



# Teach Gwinnett: A Case Study

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**Teach Gwinnett: A Case Study**

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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## **Dedication**

For Dad,  
Who believes in me more than anyone, and  
Never lets me forget about life's true priorities.

and

For Mom,  
Who understands me better than anyone, and  
Never lets me forget about all that is possible.

## Acknowledgements

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## **Table of Contents**

Abstract	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Policy Implementation and the Role of Organizational Culture	21
Chapter 3: Methodology	33
Chapter 4: The Georgia Factor	41
Chapter 5: The Gwinnett Factor	53
Chapter 6: Teach Gwinnett	62
Chapter 7: The Gwinnett Way	84
Chapter 8: Conclusion	111
Appendices	124
References	148
Vita	160

## **Abstract**

Attempting to drive change through federal policy is a complicated business. On the one hand, legislation that is too prescriptive may result in unintended consequences. On the other hand, federal policy lacking substance or offering too much flexibility may not produce any actual change in behavior. Policies that offer sufficient flexibility to street-level bureaucrats, who have professional expertise and knowledge of their local context, may create the opportunity to implement change in ways that support the underlying goals of federal policymakers.

In 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) fundamentally changed the role of the federal government in education. In addition to requiring that states accepting federal funds hold schools and districts accountable for student achievement, NCLB aimed to ensure that all students had access to “highly qualified” teachers. The landmark legislation introduced requirements that all teachers working in core subject areas meet three specific criteria: hold a bachelor’s degree, demonstrate content knowledge, and attain full state certification. Yet, the law offered several compromises intended to minimize burden on states, districts, schools and even some educators while encouraging innovation in teacher preparation.

The experience of Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) provides an opportunity to examine how the ambition of the highly qualified policy, coupled with its flexibility, influenced teacher preparation in one of the nation’s largest school systems. While attempting to address the requirements of the policy, GCPS experienced substantial growth of the student population, which added complexity to the process of implementing the policy. In response, the district developed its own district-based



teacher preparation program, Teach Gwinnett. Initially, district leaders intended to use the program to recruit recent college graduates and mid-career changers with subject matter knowledge in areas of high demand. However, the program quickly became a strategy for certifying non-highly qualified educators already working in the school system. District leaders embraced the opportunity to retain teachers who lacked required certification but who were already working in the school system. Simultaneously, the district used this program as an opportunity to ensure and reinforce candidates' assimilation into the district's distinctive internal culture.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

In 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which fundamentally shifted the federal government's engagement in K-12 public education. States accepting federal education funding under NCLB were tasked with developing plans designed to lead to the achievement of specific outcomes, including the expectation that all teachers be highly qualified. Ostensibly, the purpose of the highly qualified policy was to decrease the number of students taught by ineffective educators. The federal government hoped to achieve this outcome by specifying minimum requirements for teachers working in core academic areas. The actual impact of the policy would rely on implementation at state, district and school levels.

As state departments of education, districts, and schools began to grapple with the new requirements of NCLB, a debate surfaced about whether teachers enrolled in alternative preparation programs could be considered highly qualified. The new policy indicated that highly qualified teachers should have full, valid licenses. However, the law also stated that an educator may be considered highly qualified if the individual has passed the required assessments and holds a license to teach in the state. Debate ensued about whether educators enrolled in alternative preparation programs, generally issued provisional or temporary licenses, could be considered highly qualified. The Bush administration moved quickly to clarify that teachers enrolled in alternative preparation programs could be considered highly qualified.

The directive was likely intended to help solidify and encourage the continued expansion of alternative routes to certification. Alternative preparation had originally

emerged in states that were searching for new ways to enhance the supply of educators, especially those in high-need areas. Initially, the federal government played no role in the development and growth of this pathway to teaching. However, the Bush administration, with the support of at least some members of Congress, saw NCLB and its highly qualified teacher policy as an opportunity to promote the expansion of these programs. Even the *Secretary's [First] Annual Report on Teacher Quality* included a chapter titled, "Preparing and Certifying Highly Qualified Teachers: Today's Broken System and Its Alternative" and called alternative routes to certification, "a model for the future" (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p.11-15). The report went on to make a case for embracing alternate routes to certification, stating:

In summary, we have found that rigorous research indicates that verbal ability and content knowledge are the most important attributes of highly qualified teachers. In addition, there is little evidence that education school course work leads to improved student achievement. Furthermore, today's certification system discourages some of the most talented candidates from entering the profession while allowing too many poorly qualified individuals to teach. Finally, alternate routes to certification demonstrate that streamlined systems can boost the quantity of teachers while maintaining—or even improving—their quality. (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p.19)

Although states varied in their approaches to implementing the new policy, many utilized the option to consider those educators enrolled in alternative preparation programs as highly qualified.

The State of Georgia not only allowed, but also promoted this practice. In fact, Georgia's support of alternative routes to certification led to the development of a small, district-based teacher preparation program in the state's largest school system, Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS). One of the nation's largest districts, GCPS is well-known as a highly successful school system with a well-developed and distinctive organizational culture. GCPS experienced astronomical growth in its student population over the last decade, and, consequently, hired large numbers of teachers, including more than 1,300 new teachers in 2007. By that time, the demand for highly qualified teachers had reached a fever pitch, generating unprecedented pressure on the teacher labor market not only in Gwinnett County, but also across the entire state of Georgia. That same year, GCPS applied for, and was granted, the right to support a state-sanctioned, district-based, alternative teacher preparation program, Teach Gwinnett. This alternative preparation program was initially developed to recruit educators in high-need areas, such as special education. As demand for teachers grew, however, the program became a mechanism to allow educators already working in the district to meet the highly qualified demands of NCLB. The district took advantage of a confluence of factors to continue to be able to employ individuals selected by local school leaders, ensure they met federal certification requirements, and socialize them into the district's unusually strong internal culture.

In this dissertation, I use Teach Gwinnett as a case study to examine the implementation of the highly qualified policy as it traveled the path from federal aspiration to local implementation. I revisit key ideas introduced in the implementation literature to shed light on their continued applicability in the age of NCLB. In addition, I pay particular attention to how organizational culture played a role in the development

and implementation of this program. Although some prior literature examining implementation considers contextual factors, there is inadequate attention to the role of organizational culture. As background for my analysis, I provide an introduction to the district-based teacher preparation program that serves as the case for this study, an overview of the history and characteristics of alternative certification routes to teacher certification, and a brief discussion of the origins and development of alternative teacher preparation.

### **The Intersection of Federal Policy and Teacher Quality**

Prior to the 2001 enactment of NCLB, the federal government's limited attempts to influence the quality of the teaching force had been focused on providing grants to support teacher preparation programs and the training of teachers in high-need fields, such as science and math. The first important federal initiative related to teacher development was part of the National Defense Education Act, which became law in 1958. The legislation provided funds for the recruitment and training of prospective teachers who were studying in high-need areas such as science, mathematics and foreign languages (Ramirez, 2004).

The 1965 passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) signaled a much more substantial role for the federal government in ensuring the equity of access to high quality public schooling for all students and included resources for educator development (McGuinn & Hess, 2005). The most significant component of the new law was Title I, which provided funding for districts and schools serving low-income and minority students (Schuster, 2012). Although the law represented a dramatic

increase in the role of the federal government in education, the first iteration of ESEA did not directly address teacher quality.

More recently, under the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, the federal government began to hold schools of education accountable for the production of teachers. Although the data collected for these reports were easy to manipulate and not tightly linked to program quality (Roth & Swail, 2001, p.1), they did result in the production of the annual reports from the U.S. Secretary of Education on teacher quality. These reports brought attention to the fact that many educators lacked full certification by requiring that states report on the number of educators working on emergency or alternative certificates.

### ***Highly Qualified Teachers***

NCLB marked the first time in the history of federal education legislation that policy specifically identified a set of criteria that defined who should be considered qualified to teach in our nation's public schools. Although the criteria might have seemed straightforward, the implementation was influenced by the policy design, the context in which the policy was implemented and those responsible for implementation. Instead of developing a program aimed at changing the practices of teachers through prescribing specific programs, the U.S. Department of Education required that all states develop a plan for ensuring that all teachers meet the expectations outlined by the highly qualified policy. By requiring that states develop a plan, the federal government put pressure on states to consider the qualifications of their educators.

At least three factors influenced the decision to make teacher quality a centerpiece of the new legislation. First, due in large part to a growing body of research, academics,

policymakers and practitioners agreed that teacher effectiveness was the most important within-school factor influencing student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Goldhaber, Perry & Anthony, 2004; Haycock, 1998; Sanders & Horn, 1998). In addition, even though there was little empirical evidence about the importance of educator content knowledge (Hill, Rowan & Ball, 2005), there was increasing pressure to ensure that teachers possess subject matter competence. Finally, critiques of the quality and rigor of traditional preparation programs created a lack of trust in the relationship between certification and quality. These factors combined to motivate lawmakers to set minimum expectations for teachers working in core subject areas.

Two opposing viewpoints shaped the conversation about the best approach for influencing teacher effectiveness. The first, proponents of *teaching professionalism*, argued that the best way to improve the quality of teachers would be to more tightly regulate both the specific requirements for becoming a teacher and the schools of education allowed to prepare educators. This perspective was reflected in *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future* prepared by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, and in *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* published by the Carnegie Corporation. The second, supporters of *competitive certification*, such as the Fordham Foundation as well as conservative pundits Chester Finn and Frederick Hess, pointed out the lack of evidence linking traditional preparation and educator quality (Rotherham & Mead, 2004). A growing body of research suggested that schools of education lacked sufficient rigor and often acted as little more than “cash cows” for the universities in which they were situated. For these reasons, those in the competitive certification camp supported a less regulated process that allows local districts and

schools greater choice in terms of whom they hire to teach, believing that market forces will naturally shape the quality of the teacher pool. Although these two camps may have informed the conversation about the best strategies for ensuring that all students have access to qualified educators, the resulting legislation included some significant areas of compromise (Rotherham & Mead, 2004).

### ***Defining Highly Qualified***

No Child Left Behind is a highly detailed, complex law that includes significant measures for which states, districts, and schools are held accountable. A central component of the new federal education law stipulated that all teachers working in local education agencies receiving federal funds should be highly qualified.

Beginning with the first day of the first school year after the date of enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, each local educational agency receiving assistance under this part shall ensure that all teachers hired after such day and teaching in a program supported with funds under this part are highly qualified.

(No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002, §1119(a)(1))

The law established three criteria for deeming a teacher *highly qualified* (see Appendix I for the full definition): possession of a bachelor's degree, competency in the teaching area, and full state certification. The law differentiated expectations between educators preparing to work as elementary teachers and those planning to work as middle or secondary teachers. While elementary teachers must demonstrate “subject knowledge and teaching skills” in the core academic areas, the law required that middle and secondary teachers pass a rigorous exam of the content they teach and complete significant coursework in the field. Lawmakers set forth the expectation that states and



local school systems receiving federal funding related to NCLB submit plans, including *measureable objectives*, detailing how they intended to ensure that all teachers working in core academic subjects would be designated as highly qualified by the end of the 2005-06 academic year. States and districts were required to submit annual reports providing evidence about performance against the identified measureable objectives and required the Secretary of Education to compile the information in a comprehensive, public report (NCLB, 2002, §1119(a)(2)- §1119(b)(2)).

### ***Highly Qualified Flexibility***

Although NCLB's drafters intended to radically change who was deemed qualified to teach, several compromises embedded in the law likely limited the intended impact of the highly qualified teacher requirements. First, policymakers allowed states to develop means by which veteran educators could demonstrate content knowledge without having to pass content assessments. These High, Objective, Uniform State Standards of Evaluation (HOUSSE) were to be determined by states and could rely on evidence such as experience or professional training (U.S. Department of Education, 2004b). Nearly, all states used this aspect of the law as a way to identify veteran teachers as highly qualified by virtue of their experience alone. For that reason, this flexibility may have limited the intended impact of the law by allowing veteran educators to remain in classrooms without demonstrating competence in the content area on an objective assessment, as new teachers were expected to do. Rather, prior experience and professional development served as verification of educator content knowledge for many veteran teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2004b).

In addition to the flexibility regarding veteran teachers, the law also gave states significant latitude for assessing the content knowledge of new teachers. Without a national assessment, states were free to select the tests used for assessing content knowledge and to identify the required score for passing the test. Some states, like Georgia, use state-specific assessments; however, most states use the Praxis Series developed by the Educational Testing Service. By allowing states to select their own assessments and set their own cut scores, the intended impact of the law on the quality of teachers was likely diminished. The *Secretary's Ninth Annual Report on Teacher Quality* finds that "receiving a passing score on the assessment may not mean the same thing as having a significant degree of content knowledge" (U.S. Department of Education, 2013, p.58).

Finally, although NCLB mandated that teachers be certified, policymakers also compromised by allowing states significant flexibility regarding requirements for achieving certification. In addition to holding a bachelor's degree and demonstrating content and skill competency, the law stated, "the teacher [must have] obtained full State certification as a teacher (including certification obtained through alternative routes to certification) or passed the State teacher licensing examination, and holds a license to teach in such State...and, the teacher has not had certification or licensure requirements waived on an emergency, temporary, or provisional basis" (NCLB, 2002, §9101 (23)(A)(i)). It is this final criterion that created confusion about whether educators enrolled in alternative preparation programs should be considered highly qualified. There were two possible ways to read the parenthetical statement, "including certification obtained through alternative routes to certification..". From one perspective, the

language could be interpreted to mean a full license, with no exceptions. The parenthetical statement could be considered as indicating that teachers who have completed alternative preparation programs would be considered highly qualified just as those who have completed traditional programs. In contrast, the language could be interpreted to mean that certification held while enrolled in an alternative preparation program could be considered equivalent to full State certification. It is this final compromise that becomes a focal point for this case study.

Certification and license types varied widely across the country. In some states, an individual must have completed an approved preparation program and passed all required assessments in order to qualify for certification. In other states, educators lacking some or all of these requirements could be eligible to qualify for a provisional license with the stipulation that requirements be met within a certain period. The lack of clarity about the definition of what it meant to be *fully certified* led to an intense debate about whether educators who were in the process of earning certification through alternative routes should be considered highly qualified while enrolled. The interpretation of this definition was critical for alternative route providers. If educators enrolled in alternative certification programs could not be considered highly qualified, efforts to expand and perhaps even maintain these innovative programs would be difficult, if not impossible.

The George W. Bush administration supported alternative routes to education and wanted to make that clear. As noted earlier, in the *Secretary's [First] Annual Report on Teacher Quality*, U.S. Department of Education officials highlighted the emerging role of

alternative pathways to teaching in meeting the challenge of placing a highly qualified teacher in every classroom:

Across the country, there are several promising experiments that recruit highly qualified candidates who are interested in teaching but did not attend schools of education and place them quickly into high-need schools, providing training, support and mentoring. If states are to meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act these programs should become models for the future, as states make it less burdensome for exceptional candidates to find teaching positions in our nation's schools. (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p.viii)

A significant advantage of alternative preparation programs was the fact that individuals could work as a full-time teacher while enrolled. If the definition of highly qualified excluded these teachers, states and districts would be inclined to select individuals who had completed preparation prior to employment.

In an effort to clarify the language of the policy, the U.S. Department of Education issued guidance. On December 2, 2002, through the rulemaking process, the U.S. Department of Education attempted to clarify that educators who earn a license through alternate routes may be considered highly qualified. In spite of the Bush administration's efforts to implement the highly qualified teacher requirements in a way that accommodated alternative preparation, the ongoing debate about this provision of NCLB led to litigation. In 2007 in California, plaintiffs brought forward a claim that the state was acting in conflict with the intention of federal lawmakers by considering educators enrolled in alternative preparation programs highly qualified. Although initial

findings supported the interpretation issued by the U.S. Department of Education, an appellate court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs in 2010 (Schuster, 2012).

The Plaintiffs' win, however, was short-lived as federal legislators acted quickly to clarify their intent by supporting the regulations promulgated by the U.S. Department of Education. Two brief sentences were included as a rider on a Continuing Resolution that would fund the federal government while Congress continued its work to approve a new budget. While the additional federal funding extended only through March 4, 2011, the provision regarding the highly qualified status of alternatively licensed educators was to be in effect until June 2013. In the fall of 2013, Congress extended the flexibility by again allowing educators enrolled in alternative preparation programs to be considered highly qualified for two additional years. The language providing this extension was embedded in a bill, the primary purpose of which was to end the shutdown of the federal government by extending funding through January 15, 2014. This has continued to fuel the debate about the wisdom of this approach (Schuster, 2012).

### **The Rise of Alternative Certification**

Long before the highly qualified requirement was implemented through NCLB, states began considering how to increase the production of high quality teachers, especially in shortage areas, such as science and math. The retirement of baby-boomers, high attrition rates among early-career teachers, growing student populations, and reduction of class sizes have each played a role in the increased demand for teachers across the nation (Ingersoll, 2011; Keigher, 2010; Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2008). School and district leaders, many already having difficulty filling hard-to-staff positions, were faced with identifying strategies to surmount another obstacle as

they attempted to recruit and hire teachers who met the highly qualified requirements of NCLB.

In 1984, New Jersey responded to a shortage of certified teachers by becoming the first state to officially sanction an alternative route to teacher certification (Klagholz, 2002). Over the course of the last three decades, almost all states<sup>1</sup> and the District of Columbia have followed suit and approved alternative teacher preparation routes (National Council on Teacher Quality [NCTQ], 2012; Feistritzer, 2005; Birkeland & Peske, 2004). The number of teachers who report having been prepared through alternative routes reflects the proliferation of these programs. According to survey responses gathered by the National Center for Education Statistics, prior to 1980 approximately 97% of all new teachers entered the profession through traditional paths. Between 1980 and 2005, the number of teachers produced through alternative routes rose steadily. From 2005 to 2010, approximately 40% of all new teachers entered the field through an alternative route, and slightly more than a quarter of those participated in district-based programs (Feistritzer, 2011). This estimate, based on a random sample of teachers, may have inflated the proportion of teachers entering classrooms through alternative routes. The *Secretary's Ninth Annual Report on Teacher Quality* indicated that 31% of all teacher preparation programs are characterized as alternative, but slightly more than two thirds of those programs are based in Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs). The report also provided details on enrollment patterns indicating that approximately 12% of all teacher preparation candidates are enrolled in alternative certification programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). The report does not

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<sup>1</sup> According to the National Council on Teacher Quality, every state except North Dakota has a route to licensure that could be considered alternative (NCTQ, 2012, p.1).

include data about the proportion of enrolled candidates who are actually placed as teachers.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Characteristics of Alternative Routes to Teaching***

In theory, several key characteristics distinguish alternative routes from traditional programs, including targeted recruitment, more rigorous selection strategies, and streamlined, on-the-job preparation (Walsh & Jacobs, 2007). Alternative routes to teaching offer pathways to the field designed to attract non-traditional candidates, such as mid-career changers and recent college graduates, by streamlining training requirements and by allowing preparation to take place while the candidate is completing preparation. Proponents of alternative routes suggest that removing barriers to teaching, such as expensive and extensive coursework, serves to broaden the pool of teacher candidates and, as a result, creates opportunities to enhance the overall quality of the teaching profession (NCTQ, 2012; Hess, 2001; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983; National Science Board, 1983). Advocates of traditional routes argue that alternative programs offer inadequate preparation and threaten to undermine the status of the profession (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005; Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002).

Many alternative routes purport to provide streamlined preparation that requires reduced coursework (sometimes none at all) with little or no obligation of student teaching (Baines, 2010). On the other hand, some proponents of alternative

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<sup>2</sup> Although it is not possible to be certain which of these reports is more accurate, the data reported for Georgia in the Secretary's Report indicates that only 15 candidates were enrolled in Teach Gwinnett in 2009-10 which is significantly fewer participants than were reported by the program. Some of the discrepancy may result from confusion about who to count as enrolled when completing Title II reporting.

preparation suggest that many “so-called” alternative routes are quite similar in structure and philosophy to traditional programs, and, therefore, offer no real alternative (Walsh & Jacobs, 2007; Ruenzel, 2002). In reality, the composition and structure of alternative certification is quite varied (Mitchell & Romero, 2010; Humphrey, Wechsler, & Hough, 2008). Most alternative programs fall into one of four structural categories: programs based in institutions of higher education, district-based programs, programs based in regional training centers or offered by third party groups, and collaborative programs involving a partnership among two or more of these agencies (Dill, 1994). These structural differences may not adequately account for other important differences among alternative preparation programs, such as selection criteria or mentoring and supervision.

Many IHEs that offer traditional teacher training programs have also developed alternative preparation programs. Supporters suggest that schools of education are best suited to train and support candidates as they learn on-the-job, while critics argue that these programs are not truly alternative, requiring candidates to participate in coursework that mirrors that offered in traditional programs. As noted by Walsh and Jacobs in their report, *Alternative Education isn't Alternative*, most alternative preparation programs reflect the practices and structures of traditional programs rather than including practices and structures, such as rigorous selection and limited coursework, touted in the *Secretary's [First] Annual Report on Teacher Quality* and that have been used to characterize some of the most well-known alternative preparation programs that are not situated within IHEs (Walsh & Jacobs, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2002). There is little evidence to suggest whether IHE-



based alternative preparation programs are more or less effective than other models of alternative preparation.

Teach for America (TFA), perhaps the most well-known alternative route to teaching, is designed to recruit candidates with impressive academic credentials who agree to work in schools and districts facing significant challenges. In addition to the rigorous selection criteria, TFA is also well-known for supporting a streamlined entry to the classroom. The model requires only a few weeks of training with minimal clinical experiences<sup>3</sup> prior to being assigned as a teacher-of-record.<sup>4</sup> Supporters suggest that these inexperienced educators bring intelligence and determination that more than compensates for the limited training they receive prior to entering the classroom (Heitin, 2011). Critics of programs like TFA contend that the program does little to improve the academic opportunity of students and contributes to the perception that teaching is not a rigorous profession requiring intense training to acquire the requisite knowledge and skills. Critics have also suggested that the training and support provided to TFA teachers is woefully inadequate, leaving candidates without adequate support in some of our nation's most challenging teaching environments with some of our most at-risk students. Furthermore, critics contend that TFA teachers are not more effective than teachers entering the field through other pathways and that the high rate of attrition only exacerbates existing problems (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005).

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<sup>3</sup>A clinical experience is an opportunity for a teacher preparation candidate to gain experience working in a classroom while another educator is primarily responsible for instruction and student learning.

<sup>4</sup>A teacher-of-record is the educator officially assigned responsibility for instruction and student learning in a classroom.

The growth of another type of alternative route to certification, residency models, suggests that there is increasing interest in developing programs that offer intensive on-the-job preparation under the tutelage of a veteran educator. Residency models, like the Boston Teacher Residency, recruit non-traditional candidates and place them in the classrooms of veteran teachers. Residency models utilize a significant clinical experience paired with practical training to provide the candidate with authentic learning experiences. Increasing attention focused on residency programs has resulted in research examining programs such as the Boston Teacher Residency and the Academy for Urban School Leadership in Chicago (Solomon, 2009; Berry et al., 2008). Because these programs require a year or more of residential experience, during which the resident is not the teacher-of-record, they differ significantly from non-residency, district-based models that place candidates as the teacher-of-record during program enrollment.

Non-residency, district-based teacher preparation programs offer another model of alternative preparation. Although some studies of alternative certification have included district-based teacher preparation programs in their overall analyses of the outcomes of alternative teacher preparation (Papay, West, Fullerton, & Kane, 2011; Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2009; Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2008), little research specifically examines the design and implementation of the district-based model of alternative certification (Dill, 1994; Stafford & Barrow, 1994; Baines, 2010). While programs such as TFA may work closely with districts, the structure of the program is managed by the external organization. Residency programs may be managed more directly by districts, but the model typically requires that the candidate spend a year

working in cooperation with a certified educator before becoming a teacher-of-record. Non-residency, district-based programs offer another model. Like residency models, the district maintains control over the structure of the program and delivery of training; however, the model also requires little clinical experience before allowing the educator to become a teacher-of-record.

Because of the dearth of research on non-residency, district-based teacher preparation programs, there is little information about the typical characteristics of such programs. By definition, non-residency, district-based alternative preparation programs are managed by a school system and therefore are particularly likely to be influenced by the local context. For instance, a school district experiencing tremendous growth with a high demand for highly qualified teachers may find that the demand is unmet by the supply of teachers trained by traditional providers. In such a case, the district could choose to implement a district-based preparation program geared towards preparing recent college graduates, paraprofessionals or career-changers in a wide variety of fields in an effort to meet the need. Even though the program may focus on recruiting certain types of candidates, the implementation of recruitment, selection and training strategies might not vary in significant ways from other types of preparation programs. On the other hand, if district officials are dissatisfied with the training provided by traditional or nearby alternative preparation programs, a district-based teacher preparation program would likely be designed to deliver customized training to support swift assimilation with local beliefs and values, to focus attention on district standards and curriculum, and to develop pedagogical skills aligned with district-preferred practices. Regardless of the particular local context in which the program is developed, other factors such as federal

policy or state requirements may also shape the design and implementation of the program.

### ***Effectiveness of Alternative Routes to Teaching***

Providers often design alternative programs to address teacher shortages in critical needs areas (Ruckel, 2000) or to recruit teachers from under-represented groups, such as males and minorities (Birkeland & Peske, 2004; Brannan & Reichardt, 2002). In comparison to traditional routes, higher percentages of teachers produced through alternative preparation routes teach math, science, special education and English language learners (Feistritzer, 2011). Evidence also suggests that alternative programs succeed in drawing more male and minority teachers into the profession than traditional programs (Feistritzer, 2011; Peterson & Nadler, 2009; Birkeland & Peske, 2004; Ruenzel, 2002; Shen, 1997). Although alternative route programs are designed to improve teacher quality by removing barriers that prevent high quality candidates from reaching the classroom (Birkeland & Peske, 2004), debate regarding the effectiveness of teachers trained through alternative certification programs persists (Glass, 2008; Seftor & Mayer, 2003; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005; Decker, Mayer, & Glazerman, 2004; Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002). However, research suggests that there is greater variation of teacher effectiveness within programs rather than across program types (Boyd et al., 2009; Kane et al., 2008), suggesting that alternative routes offer a pathway for candidates with promising attributes, such as deep content knowledge and relevant career experience.

Although alternative preparation models continue to proliferate, there is no evidence that these models, in general, consistently produce more effective teachers than traditional preparation programs. Rather, alternative preparation programs serve as a tool for broadening the pool of potential teacher candidates by reducing barriers to entry for career-changers and other non-traditional candidates. This strategy, therefore, can help districts meet the demand for teachers, especially in areas of critical shortage. District-based teacher preparation may also offer other benefits to districts willing to take on the challenge of training new educators. When districts develop their own curriculum and clinical experiences, they have the opportunity to tailor the program to meet their own needs. These benefits may help to explain why a district would take on the additional burden of training its own workforce. One example is the district-based, alternative teacher preparation program developed in Gwinnett County, Georgia.

For this case study, I focus on how Georgia and GCPS utilized flexibility related to the highly qualified provisions of NCLB to retain teachers already working in the school system by enrolling such teachers in a district-based, alternative preparation program. By taking control of teacher preparation, the district increased its command over the approach to teaching and the emphasis of certain teaching behaviors. Instead of selecting and hiring new teachers, GCPS used this flexibility to enroll existing, non-highly qualified teachers in its district-based, alternative teacher preparation program, Teach Gwinnett. This case will examine how policy design, people, and context influenced the implementation of the highly qualified policy.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Policy Implementation and the Role of Organizational Culture**

The organization of American schools reflects a complex and dynamic relationship between federal, state, and local actors. Because the U.S. Constitution does not address education, states have the primary responsibility to manage education systems. In turn, states often provide significant autonomy to local districts. Over time this has led to a system of schools and districts that operate using a wide range of standards and practices (Wirt & Kirst, 2001). Therefore, when federal legislators create education policy, implementation is affected by a myriad of factors, including policy design, the people engaged in the work, and features of the local context in which they work.

We might surmise that carefully written policies that allow sufficient flexibility may be more likely to achieve the desired outcome. Yet, crafting such policy is no easy task. A policy that is written too narrowly may be rejected entirely or result in unintended consequences. However, a policy lacking substantial constraints may not result in any real changes to behavior or practice. The people responsible for implementation of policies at the local level may have the greatest influence over the impact and outcomes of a policy. These street-level bureaucrats make decisions about policy implementation in their daily work (Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977). Finally, although the literature clearly indicates that various features of the local context affect implementation, there is little research that specifically explores how district culture affects implementation. For that reason, I also review literature related to organizational

culture and the limited work specifically related to examining the culture of school districts.

### **Understanding Implementation**

No matter how well-intentioned a policy is, the results will be dictated by implementation. The literature on implementation suggests that as federal policymakers design policies, they should consider those responsible for implementation and the context within which implementation will take place, as each has a significant impact on the degree to which the goals of policies drive changes in behavior and result in desired outcomes. In *Education Policy Implementation* (1991), Milbrey McLaughlin traces the origins of the theory that implementation dominates outcomes. She notes that,

[Pressman and Wildavsky] were first in the first generation of implementation analysts who showed that implementation dominates outcomes – that the consequences of even the best planned, best supported, and most promising policy initiatives depend finally on what happens as individuals throughout the policy system interpret and act on them (Bardach 1997; Berman & McLaughlin 1978; Elmore 1977; Van Meter & Van Horn 1975, for example). (McLaughlin in Odden, 1991)

Early investigation of implementation processes highlighted the fact that policies often failed to result in desired outcomes or changes in behaviors. Eager to understand the causes, researchers began to examine what happened after policy formation and found that the way a policy is implemented has a significant impact on whether the goals of the policy are achieved. Pressman and Wildavsky's seminal book on the implementation of federal policy, *Implementation: How Great Expectations in Washington are Dashed in*

*Oakland; or, Why it's Amazing that Federal Programs Work at All* (1973), illuminated the complexity of taking a federal policy from conception to implementation and all of the factors in between that influence the outcome. As noted by McLaughlin in *Education Policy Implementation*, “the first generation of implementation analysis showed how local factors such as size, intra-organizational relations, commitment, capacity, and institutional complexity molded responses to policy” (1991, p. 186). This generation of research on implementation focused on understanding why many federal policies failed to produce their desired outcomes.

Later scholars attempted to explain variation in implementation outcomes across policies and settings. In particular, implementation researchers in the 1970s and 1980s began to explore how policy design, those responsible for implementation, and local context might influence implementation. One of the most significant studies of that group focused on policies designed to improve teacher effectiveness, and suggested that changing educator behavior was difficult work that required significant localized support that could respond to the local context and the expertise of the teachers responsible for the implementation (McLaughlin, 1984). Until the passage of NCLB, federal policy related to teacher quality and effectiveness had a limited focus. Some efforts focused primarily on recruiting educators by providing funding directly to preparation programs and offering loan forgiveness. Other types of policy were aimed at changing how teachers did their work or how educators tracked data for specific student populations (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975; McLaughlin 1984; Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977). NCLB was the first attempt to exert federal control over who should be considered qualified to teach.



More recently, Honig (2006) offered a framework highlighting factors that earlier researchers had begun to identify: policy, people and places. She suggested that there is such great complexity in the process of implementation that one must consider each of these factors in order to better understand the implementation process. She suggests that emerging research “aims to uncover [the] various dimensions” of how these three factors influence implementation. In this thesis, I analyze how various mechanisms related to these three categories may have affected the implementation process. I consider whether the concept of mutual adaptation, as a function of policy design, is reflected in the implementation of the highly qualified policy through Teach Gwinnett. I also examine how the people responsible for implementation, street-level bureaucrats, played a role in shaping the process of implementation. Finally, I focus on the role of context by considering how place matters by examining how district culture affects implementation.

### ***Policy – Mutual Adaptation***

Berman and McLaughlin (1975) made an important contribution to implementation research when they suggested that policies most likely to achieve the intended outcome are those that allow for mutual adaptation during the implementation process. The concept of mutual adaptation suggests that both the program and the actors responsible for implementation, as well as the organization where the implementation is taking place, must be amenable to some level of change to increase the odds of achieving desired results. Mutual adaptation requires some adjustment to the program, such as “reduction or modification of idealistic project goals, amendment or simplification of project treatment, [or] downward revision of ambitious expectations for behavioral change” (p.24). In addition, those responsible for implementation must also change their

behavior. The authors note that programs are often applied to teachers who must be willing to shift their own behavior in order for the program to have any impact. Further, such programs must be implemented by teachers who have specialized knowledge of their craft and their local context. This specialized knowledge makes educators responsible for implementation especially equipped to ascertain the strengths and limitations of the program. Beyond individual behaviors, the authors also found that school districts take advantage of “external inputs” such as federal funding, “but typically are not influenced by them to change their commitments, motivations, or concern with innovation” (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975, p. 11). Finally, the authors propose that “policies could be designed to enhance receptivity to change” and that “federal policymakers might consider ways of encouraging mutual adaptation strategies, which [they] believe are the key to effective implementation” (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975, p. 11). In this case, I consider whether there is evidence of mutual adaptation of the highly qualified policy through the execution of a district-based teacher preparation program in Gwinnett County, Teach Gwinnett.

### ***People – State Actors and Street-Level Bureaucrats***

The important role played by those responsible for implementing policy should not be underestimated. Throughout the implementation process, a variety of individuals make decisions and take actions that influence the implementation process and outcomes of the policy. Weatherley and Lipsky (1977) were the first to classify those individuals who work most directly with the consumers as *street-level bureaucrats*. They argued that these individuals are policymakers in their own right because they interpret policy and

make decisions about implementation every day. For that reason, they have a significant impact on the relationship between policy design and implementation outcomes.

In their work, Weatherley and Lipsky focus on those closest to implementation, specifically noting teachers who work directly with students. Through choices they make, these individuals determine whether and to what degree policies and programs designed by federal policymakers will result in desired changes in behavior. Not only are these people generally experts in their profession, but they also have knowledge of the context in which they operate that no policymaker could possibly possess (Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977).

I broaden my analysis to include state officials and district leaders, who play a significant role in the implementation of the highly qualified policy. Specifically, I examine how and why state leaders developed a pathway to certification that circumvented the traditional route through an institution of higher education. I also analyze how district leaders, as street-level bureaucrats, took advantage of the opportunity to create a district-based teacher preparation program in order to use the program as a tool for initiating teachers to the culture of the district.

### ***Place – State Politics and District Culture***

The context in which a policy is implemented will also have an influence on the outcome. Researchers have identified many contextual factors that may influence implementation. For instance, the scope of change and the degree to which stakeholders agree to the change may have an impact on the likelihood of achieving policy goals (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975). When implementation requires significant changes or changes opposed by key stakeholders, achieving the desired outcome is likely to be more

challenging than implementation requiring minimal change in a supportive environment. Another contextual factor that may influence implementation is the nature of the relationship (including the perceived balance of power) among the organization creating policies and the organization responsible for putting those policies into practice. If the organization requiring implementation has authority to issue sanctions or offer incentives, the organization may be able to exert more control or influence during the process of implementation. However, communication within and between organizations may be just as important as authority. In order for implementation to achieve desired outcomes, those responsible for implementing must clearly understand how to carry out the work and have the capacity to do so. Finally, implementation may also be influenced by environmental factors that have little to do with the policy itself, such as the economic or political environment in which the policy is to be implemented (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975; Duemer & Mendez-Morse, 2002; Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman & Wallace, 2005). My case study analysis attends to many of the contextual factors identified by previous research. I focus in particular, however, on how district culture influenced the implementation of the highly qualified policy through Teach Gwinnett.

### **Organizational Culture**

There is significant literature that considers the role of school culture in shaping implementation outcomes, but only limited research specifically focused on district culture. Although the culture of schools certainly plays a role in implementation, the culture of the district should also be considered. As noted above, I argue that the definition of street-level bureaucrats could be broadened to include district-level

educators who are responsible for implementation of federal- and state-level policies in districts and schools. In regard to a policy related to teacher quality, these actors make key decisions about how the policy is implemented. For this reason, it is reasonable to expect that the implementation of educational reform efforts is highly influenced by the culture of the district. For the purposes of this analysis, I consider literature focused on district culture, but also rely on the broader literature on organizational culture.

### ***Understanding Organizational Culture***

Edgar Schein (2010) usefully defines *culture* as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (p. 18). Deal and Kennedy (1983) offer a simpler and more direct understanding of organizational culture as the “way we do things around here” (p.14). Although it is important to consider how external influences affected implementation, scholars emphasize that examining programs, policies, and practices of a school district through the lens of organizational culture can provide insight regarding how a district may integrate new members (James & Connolly, 2009).

In *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Schein (2010) offers three elements through which organizational culture can be examined: artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions. Artifacts are those aspects of a culture that are tangible or easily observed, such as the space in which the organization operates or the ways that members of an organization interact. Symbols, rituals, and ceremonies are important artifacts that give organizations the capacity to acknowledge, celebrate, and

communicate their values and beliefs (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Espoused beliefs and values might be recorded as artifacts in organizational documents or reported by members of the organization. Finally, Schein defines the deepest level of organizational culture as the set of assumptions that guides the overall purpose and reflects members' deep-seated beliefs. These assumptions, he argues, are beliefs and values that are so entrenched in an organization that they are essentially taken for granted.

Members of an organization play critical roles in developing and communicating culture (Schein, 2010). Scholars focused on addressing the need for cultural change in education highlight the significant role leaders play in developing and managing the culture of an organization (Fullan, 2002; Leithwood, 2005). Heroes and heroines are individuals recognized within cultures as those whose actions or achievements embody the values and beliefs of the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Of course, individual contributions are not limited to heroes and heroines, but also include disruptive individuals who challenge the status quo, individuals who disseminate knowledge, or those who act as historians by providing an institutional memory (Schein, 2010).

### ***Examining District Culture***

A school system is a very specific and unique type of organization tasked with managing the learning process for students while working under the guidance of both federal and state policy. Districts have often been characterized as “dysfunctional” and “lacking the capacity to lead, design, and implement much needed improvements, and, in fact often obstruct needed reforms” (Corcoran & Lawrence, 2003). Regardless of whether the results are positive or negative, there is reason to believe that districts play a pivotal role in the implementation process. Although there has been considerable

research that considers school culture, the existing research that focuses specifically on understanding district culture is quite limited. The research that does exist suggests that there are some key characteristics associated with successful districts, including strong leadership and organizational capacity.

The research on implementation identifies the important role played by street-level bureaucrats. When considering the implementation of education policy designed to address teacher quality, of which the highly qualified policy is a prime example, district leaders are on the front lines of the work. They are often directly responsible for deciding how to implement federal and state policies. McAdams and Zinck argue that there is a “[clearly established] relationship between organizational culture and leadership” (1998, p.3). They identify four specific behaviors of effective district leaders: “focus of attention, goal-directed activity, modeling of positive behavior, [and] emphasis on human resources” (1998, p.6). These behaviors are aligned with the characteristics of districts that experience successful implementation practices identified in the limited literature focusing on district culture.

Capacity includes the “knowledge, skills, personnel, and other resources necessary to carry out decisions” (Firestone, 1989, p.157). The degree to which a district successfully implements policies or programs is associated with the characteristics of the organization. In a review of the literature conducted by Corcoran and Lawrence (2003), the authors highlighted a set of characteristics associated with districts that experienced success implementing instructional reform efforts (see Figure I).

**Figure I. District characteristics associated with successful implementation of instructional reform efforts**

- Leadership focused on results and committed to instructional improvement;
- A focused strategy for improving instruction that is sustained over multiple years;
- The alignment of critical policies to guide practice and to support improvement;
- The provision of resources to implement the reforms;
- Clear expectations about classroom practice;
- Support for teacher learning and adequate investments in professional development;
- Development of communities of practice in central offices and schools that share a common vision of good practice and beliefs about teaching and learning; and
- The use of data and evidence to drive decisions and revise strategies.

(Corcoran & Lawrence, 2003, p.5)

Although the authors were focused on characteristics of districts implementing instructional reform efforts, these characteristics might also be applied to other types of reform efforts, such as the design and implementation of strategies for recruiting and retaining high quality educators.

## **Conclusion**

Relying on a framework developed in Honig (2006), my analysis considers how policy, people and places influence the implementation of federal education policy. In particular, I examine how the design of the highly qualified policy, state and local actors, and the culture of the school district influenced the implementation of the highly qualified policy through a district-based alternative teacher preparation program in Gwinnett County, Georgia. I analyze how GCPS used flexibility in the highly qualified policy to implement a program designed to meet the needs of the district and further strengthen the culture of the district. In particular, my analyses will provide new



evidence on how district culture influences the implementation of federal policy.

Understanding how district culture intersects with implementation in the field of education may help policymakers and practitioners design policies and implement practices that are more likely to result in improved outcomes for students.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

There is inadequate research that considers the influence of the culture of school districts on the implementation of federal and state policies. The introduction of the highly qualified provision of NCLB offers an opportunity to examine how flexibility in the law was interpreted and implemented in Gwinnett County Public Schools (Georgia) through its district-based teacher preparation program, Teach Gwinnett. Growing investment in such programs suggests that school districts have an interest in exerting control over the selection of teacher candidates and their preparation. This case study offers an opportunity to consider the dynamic environment in which one district-based preparation program developed. I consider the influence of contextual factors on the impetus for, and the implementation of, Teach Gwinnett and specifically how organizational culture intersected with federal and state policies. I organize my analyses by considering the intersection between federal, state and local organizations.

### **Research Design**

My theoretical framework suggests that the implementation of a new federal policy, such as the highly qualified requirement of NCLB, will be highly dependent on the design of the policy, the context in which it is implemented, and the people responsible for the implementation. For this case study, I set out to examine how these factors influenced the development and implementation of a district-based alternative preparation program in Gwinnett County (Georgia) Public Schools. In addition, I also considered how Gwinnett County may have utilized district-based alternative preparation

as a way to maintain its staffing strategy amidst new federal and state regulations and to advance the development and acceptance of district-based cultural norms.

Initially, I examined how the state and local teacher labor market played a role in the need for Teach Gwinnett, influenced the purpose of the program, and drove recruitment practices. I also considered how state and federal policies guided and shifted program purpose and strategies related to recruitment of candidates for Teach Gwinnett. To examine the influence of organizational culture, I considered how the structure of the district had an impact on hiring practices, standardization of program content, and the source of program funding. In addition, I investigated how organizational culture influenced program purpose and content, development of and support for teachers. As I began to investigate these issues, I noticed some unexpected anomalies in the data that led me to consider how Gwinnett County leaders utilized flexibility in the highly qualified policy to meet their needs just as much, if not more than, how the district adapted to meet the spirit of the new policy.

The purpose of this study was not to provide a definitive answer about whether Teach Gwinnett is a successful program, but rather to consider *how* and *why* the program developed the way that it did by examining those influences that had an impact on the program outcomes. Yin (2009) referencing Schramm (1971) notes that case studies often involve the exploration of “a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result” (Yin, 2009, p.17). This description mirrors the structure of my research questions, validating the selection of the case study methodology. In the sections below, I describe the data I collected and my strategies for analysis.

## **Data Collection**

As a former employee in the Office of Research and Evaluation in GCPS, I was part of a team tasked with preparing a project evaluation of Teach Gwinnett in preparation for a review by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (PSC). While this case study examines contextual factors external to the program, the project evaluation served as an internal examination of whether and how the Teach Gwinnett program has achieved stated goals and objectives.<sup>5</sup> In conjunction with colleagues, I developed instruments and sampling procedures for the purposes of the project evaluation. During the development process, I attended to the focus of my case study as well. Creating instruments and procedures suitable for both purposes enabled collection of data that limited burden on subjects and was expected to ensure a high response rate. As such, instruments included some items only pertinent to the project evaluation, while others were only pertinent to this study. In addition, I collected some data that will only be used for this case study, including interviews with state –level stakeholders.

To frame the collection of data, I identified key stakeholders, policies and documents relevant to the implementation of the Teach Gwinnett program. I also used reports from the local and state media outlets to gain insight on perspectives of the program, district leaders, and even organizational culture. Each source provided essential evidence that enabled me to conduct in-depth analyses related to my research questions.

## ***Interviews and Focus Groups***

I collected data from semi-structured interviews of 20 Teach Gwinnett participants, 5 Teach Gwinnett supervisors, each member of the Teach Gwinnett program

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<sup>5</sup> My team was assigned the task of program evaluation before we realized that there were no clearly stated or measureable goals or objectives assigned to the program. One of our primary findings was that program staff should develop clear goals and objectives.

staff, 3 members of the district leadership team, and 2 officials from the PSC (Appendix II). In addition, I gathered and analyzed data from 2 focus groups with Teach Gwinnett mentors (Appendix III). All subjects signed letters of informed consent. Participants are not identified and all data are reported in the aggregate. Interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed.

### ***Documents***

I collected documents that provide demographic, cultural, economic, and political information about local, state and federal entities relevant to the Teach Gwinnett program. This includes program documents, information about local- and state-level teacher preparation, local documentation of the attrition and retention of teachers, state-level policy and guidelines related to the implementation of alternative certification programs, federal policy, and related documents. In an effort to better understand the community reaction to the development and implementation of this program and search for articles providing information about district leadership, I examined media sources. I conducted searches of both the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* and the local paper in Gwinnett County, the *Gwinnett Daily Post*.

### ***Administrative Data***

Demographic, school, position, and salary data were collected for all current and former Teach Gwinnett participants. In addition to data on Teach Gwinnett participants, I collected school-level administrative data in order to examine the characteristics of schools where Teach Gwinnett participants work. Finally, I gathered budget information regarding the implementation of the Teach Gwinnett program. A table describing the data that I used for my analyses is included in Appendix IV.

## *Surveys*

Using emerging themes that developed from the analysis of interview and focus group data, which offered a deep perspective from selected participants, I administered a brief survey to principals in July 2011. The primary purpose of this instrument was to gauge awareness of the program among school leaders and to examine whether and how these leaders perceived the value of the Teach Gwinnett program. These perspectives offered additional evidence to consider in determining whether and how organizational culture played a role in the implementation of Teach Gwinnett. SurveyMonkey<sup>TM</sup> was used as the platform for administering the instrument, and a link was emailed to each subject. Several reminder emails were sent to increase response rates. Seventy-two of the 120 school leaders responded to the survey request (60% response rate).<sup>6</sup> For most items, each of the 72 respondents provided an answer; however, for some questions fewer leaders elected to respond. Although it is not possible to be certain, response rates seemed to decline when the respondents were asked to provide a narrative response, to indicate information about their individual participation in Teach Gwinnett, and when asked to identify the subject areas taught by Teach Gwinnett candidates.

## **Data Analysis**

Following the collection of data, I prepared brief thematic memos to guide my initial analyses. Based on these analyses, I developed a set of emic codes designed to capture and categorize information regarding each of the key concepts identified through the review of the literature on teacher labor markets and organizational culture. Codes were refined over time through iterative coding. This process allowed me to focus on the

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<sup>6</sup> The principal of each school received the email requesting participation, but they were instructed that identifying an alternate leader (such as an assistant principal who worked with Teach Gwinnett candidates) would also be appropriate.

data as a way to make meaning of and attend to important themes that may arise apart from those identified through the literature (Emic and Etic, n.d.). Coded data informed the development of analytic matrices.

During the analytic phase of my research, I prepared matrices to support my exploration and analysis of external factors that have influenced the Teach Gwinnett program. The matrices were used to explore how key concepts are reflected across research participants. For example, during each interview participants were asked why they believe the district supported Teach Gwinnett. I anticipated that responses might provide some information regarding participants' perspectives on the local teacher labor market or highlight particular shared beliefs about how quality teachers are developed in GCPS. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that this strategy allows the researcher to examine why particular outcomes were achieved and to consider the factors that influenced attainment of those outcomes. I then used these matrices to support my attempts to develop explanations by examining the alignment and misalignment of data across sources. Themes and patterns arise as the matrix is prepared (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

### **Threats to Validity**

Maxwell (2005) identifies two particular threats to validity that require attention in qualitative research: *researcher bias* and *reactivity*. To address these threats, I utilized multiple strategies. All interviews and focus group data were transcribed offering "rich" sources of evidence (Maxwell, 2005, p.110), which allowed for deep examination of findings. As I developed memos to support emerging themes from the data, I worked to ensure that findings reflected evidence from multiple sources. Initially, I drafted memos

based on interview data based on coding schemes developed using the qualitative software. Through the development of coding schemes and memo writing, themes began to emerge. In particular, I identified evidence that contextual factors, such as how the state and local economic and political contexts played a role in the development and implementation of Teach Gwinnett. Ultimately, the review of data led to a series of themes that are explored in this case study. As I drafted memos, and later chapters, I incorporated interview data, information from media outlets, and quantitative information, including administrative and survey data. As I arrived at findings, I reviewed data to search for cases that conflict with or are contrary to my findings. In some cases, I did find data that conflicted with preliminary findings and adjusted my analyses to reflect these findings.

Perhaps the most distinct threat to the validity of this study was my own bias. When I began this research project, I was an employee of GCPS. While employed by the district for approximately two years, I worked in the Office of Research and Evaluation. As a part of that team, I worked closely with many of the district-level employees interviewed and surveyed for this project. In some cases, my employment may have created unexpected complications while collecting data. For instance, interviewees may have been reluctant to share views that might have been perceived as critical of district leadership. In an effort to manage these challenges, I took specific steps to limit the impact. Although there is no way to entirely eliminate reactivity from participant responses, I attempted to moderate this threat to validity by carefully explaining to all participants that their responses would be treated as anonymous and that the purpose of



the interview was to support the continuous improvement of district operations, particularly Teach Gwinnett.

To address researcher bias, I triangulated findings across sources of evidence, searched for and identified discrepant data, engaged in member checks, and wrote memos throughout the process of data analysis. I used multiple sources of data, including documentation related to Teach Gwinnett, online informational data regarding the state alternative pathway, interview transcripts for district leaders, Teach Gwinnett staff and Teach Gwinnett candidates. I also collected survey data from principals and analyzed district administrative data. Finally, I collected data from media sources. During the initial stages of research, I engaged in member checks with research participants, including members of the Office of Research and Evaluation and Teach Gwinnett staff. To ensure that my findings were based on sufficient evidence, I shared preliminary and final analyses with faculty members serving on my dissertation committee and former doctoral students from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Georgia Factor**

The development of Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program (GaTAPP), Georgia's most recently developed alternative pathway to teaching, closely coincided with the initial implementation of the highly qualified requirements of NCLB. Designed to reduce barriers to entry into the profession, the pathway mandated that program completers demonstrate competencies based on the Charlotte Danielson Framework to qualify for a renewable license in Georgia. In this chapter, I consider how the design of the highly qualified policy interacted with the state's licensure system, review some of the key state-level contextual factors that affected implementation, and consider the role of state-level actors.

#### **Georgia's Licensure Policy**

Prior to the implementation of the highly qualified teacher policy, Georgia, like most states, required that a teacher hold a bachelor's degree, a license, and pass required assessments. Also like many other states, Georgia offered provisional licenses for educators who were enrolled in preparation programs (Rotherham & Mead, 2004). Thus, the requirements that individual educators had to meet in order to be certified did not change because of the highly qualified requirement. The most significant shift was that schools, districts and states were being held accountable for ensuring that all core academic educators actually met this expectation.

While the lofty purpose of the highly qualified policy was to ensure that all students had access to high quality educators, federal lawmakers limited the qualifications to only three criteria. Furthermore, they allowed states to define and set

specific requirements for two of the three: 1) the specific requirements for achieving licensure and 2) the required assessments and the corresponding passing scores. Federal lawmakers knew that most states, districts and schools were not equipped to meet more stringent criteria, such as qualification based on teacher evaluation or performance data. Further, because of the long history of state and local control in education (Wirt & Kirst, 2001), any attempt to institute a national license or national assessment almost certainly would have failed. So, policymakers focused on three criteria that could be defined state-by-state.

Georgia leaders developed a comprehensive plan designed to meet the expectations of NCLB. The plan primarily focused on providing resources to schools and districts to support the reduction of the number of non-highly qualified teachers and defined expectations for reporting (Georgia Department of Education, 2006). The plan required that all districts and schools used a state-managed database to submit data on non-highly qualified teachers. The most significant change to the actual structure of licensure in Georgia was a reduction in the number of years an educator could work on a provisional license from five to three. Although the policy provided significant flexibility for states and districts to make decisions about implementation strategies, there were no significant changes to the policy that reflected the tenets of mutual adaptation as described by Berman and McLaughlin. Additional flexibilities offered to states by the U.S. Department of Education did not rise to the level of change that the authors suggest, such as significant revision of ambitious expectations.

## **State-Level Actors**

As the literature on implementation suggests, the people responsible for implementation have significant influence on the outcomes of a policy. State officials understood the growing demand for teachers in Georgia, but pressure to have a teacher, specifically a highly qualified teacher, in every classroom was more acutely felt by district leaders. In the late 1990s, district leaders were clamoring for new ways to bring teachers to the classroom. At the urging of a group of superintendents in Northwest Georgia, the state granted authority for a new alternative pathway to teaching (U.S. Department of Education, 2004a). The Northwest Regional Educational Service Agency (NW-RESA) developed a program and in 2000 petitioned the PSC for authorization to prepare and to recommend candidates for teacher licensure (U.S. Department of Education, 2004aa). The program was unique in two ways. First, the program did not include a partnership with an IHE. Prior to this, all teacher preparation programs in Georgia had been situated within an IHE. In addition, candidates enrolled in this program would be employed as teachers-of-record throughout the preparation phase. This group of superintendents clearly saw the need for additional pathways to licensure for teachers, and wanted to offer a program more closely linked to the school systems that would rely on rigorous selection strategies and practical training. These superintendents influenced the implementation of the highly qualified teacher policy by creating the impetus for the program on which GaTAPP was ultimately modeled.

Leaders from the PSC suggest that in part because of the emphasis NCLB placed on alternative preparation programs, the state became more focused on recruiting individuals into teaching, such as recent college graduates and mid-career changers, who

could bring strong content knowledge to the profession (PSC – 1). State leaders recognized that this type of program held potential not only for producing more teachers, but that this type of pathway could serve as a fundamentally different model of preparation. According to PSC staff, programs developed in this model would be focused on skills and competencies that new teachers would need to possess rather than coursework heavily focused on the philosophies and theories of education that characterized many IHE preparation programs (PSC-1). In 2001, the first cohort of teachers prepared through Georgia’s new alternative route to teaching, Teach for Georgia, entered classrooms across the state.

### **Reaction in Georgia**

Not everyone was in favor of the new alternate route to licensure. In the spring of 2001, the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* reported that the state was “facing such a serious teacher shortage that it is creating a monthlong [sic] crash course to train people willing to drop the jobs they have to become teachers” (Donsky, April 25, 2001, p. 1A). The article went on to quote the director of the PSC who stated, “We’re trying to help address the shortage that we have and to develop a model that allows a quick way to get into the classroom” (Donsky, April 25, 2001). Through a series of articles, the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* documented the response to this new model of preparing teachers. Not surprisingly, local supporters of higher education, union leaders, and even some teachers derided the new model and argued that the four-week summer institute was inadequate preparation for entering the classroom as the teacher-of-record (Donsky, May 19, 2001).

The decision to develop GaTAPP, modeled after the successful program run by the Northwest RESA, represented a concerted effort to reduce barriers for individuals

who might want to enter the profession without enrolling in traditional teacher preparation programs. Initially, the state developed a single program called Teach for Georgia. The name of the program was later changed to GaTAPP because of confusion related to the state-sponsored recruitment platform, TeachGeorgia (Donsky, 2001, p. 1F). A U.S. Department of Education publication that highlighted strong alternative preparation programs characterized this model as a “two-year, research-based program [that] offers a low-cost method for bringing fully certified high-quality teachers into Georgia schools” (U.S. Department of Education, 2004a, p.37).

Following the first year of implementation, state leaders recognized the potential success of this new teacher preparation model and developed the statewide alternative pathway now known as GaTAPP. Housed within the PSC, GaTAPP outlines the structure required for an entity other than an IHE to be authorized to prepare teachers, thus allowing the model to be replicated throughout the state. The PSC set clear guidelines for programs and the qualifications that must be met for a candidate to qualify for enrollment.

In the midst of these developments, Georgia also presented to the U.S. Department of Education the state’s definition of a highly qualified teacher:

In 2002-03, Georgia adopted a basic definition of a highly qualified teacher as one who holds a bachelor’s degree or higher, has a major in the subject area or has passed the state teacher content assessment, and is assigned to teach his/her major subject(s)...A set of state guidelines... defines the highly qualified status of every type of teacher in Georgia who serves as teacher-of-record for core academic

content, including the special education teacher. (Georgia Professional Standards Commission (PSC), 2006, p.6)

The definition, notably silent on the type of certification an educator must hold in order to be considered highly qualified in Georgia, focused on the alignment of the teacher's content knowledge and the teaching assignment. Clearly, Georgia officials intended to allow educators enrolled in alternative preparation programs to be considered highly qualified. In 2004, the U. S. Department of Education highlighted two of the programs authorized through the GaTAPP pathway, the Northwest RESA and Metro RESA GaTAPP programs, as promising models of alternative preparation. These programs were lauded for the strength of their recruitment and selection plans, preparation programs, and strong mentoring and support (U.S. Department of Education, 2004a).

### **State-Level Contextual Factors**

A host of state-level contextual factors influenced the implementation of the highly qualified policy. Intergovernmental relationships, the economic climate and the demand for teachers in Georgia each contributed to the implementation of the highly qualified policy. In addition, these contextual factors led to the development of the state's alternative pathway, GaTAPP and, ultimately, the opportunity for the creation of Teach Gwinnett.

### ***Intergovernmental Relationships***

The implementation of the highly qualified policy depended on relationships between the federal government, the state and districts. The federal government has little positional authority over states regarding public education. To exert influence, the United States Department of Education offers funding to states willing to comply with

federal mandates and often threatens to withhold funds if a state or district falls out of compliance. To be eligible for funding tied to NCLB, states had to meet the requirements of the law, which included developing a plan for ensuring that all core academic educators were highly qualified and reporting on the progress towards those goals. *The Secretary's [First] Annual Report on Teacher Quality* indicated that during the 2000-01 school year approximately 10% of all Georgia educators (8,747) were working without having earned an initial license (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 60). The ongoing reporting requirements were designed to promote compliance with the law. The required public reporting put pressure on states and districts to reduce the numbers of non-highly qualified educators. In 2006, Georgia's report to the United States Department of Education on revisions to their Title II A Plan, the state reported that 5% of all classes in Gwinnett County Public Schools that required a highly qualified teacher were taught by educators who did not meet the highly qualified requirements (PSC, 2006, p.21).

In addition to the relationship with the federal government, several agencies within Georgia were engaged in the work of ensuring that educators were appropriately trained and developed. The Board of Regents (BOR), the Georgia Department of Education (GDOE) and the Office of Student Accountability (OSA) were each cited in Georgia's report to the federal government on plans for ensuring that all core academic teachers would be highly qualified. Yet, the Professional Standards Commission was the only entity directly identified as having responsibility for the implementation of NCLB Title II, Part A, including the highly qualified requirements (see Appendix V). The PSC was specifically assigned responsibility for "report[ing] annually on the state's progress



toward meeting the state's annual teacher quality goals and improvement of LEAs toward meeting teacher quality requirements" (PSC, 2006, p.3). In addition, the PSC was expected to "[d]evelop mechanisms to support certification requirements with educational opportunities" and "[d]evelop and implement state activities that complement LEA activities and needs" (PSC, 2006, p.3).

As a part of their effort to provide technical support for the implementation of the highly qualified requirement, the PSC created a tool that allowed the state to analyze the highly qualified status for all teachers (and paraprofessionals) in the state. Districts were expected to use the tool to identify needed changes or corrections. Because of the way that educators could meet highly qualified requirements, specifically through the HOUSSE standards, districts sometimes had access to information that was not available to the state. In addition, the state wanted to be certain that districts and schools had specific information about educators who did not meet highly qualified requirements. NCLB required that districts communicate with relevant stakeholders, including parents and guardians, about students placed in classrooms without highly qualified teachers. Finally, schools and districts were expected to use data reported in 2003-04 to "set their yearly objectives to achieve 100% highly qualified workforce by 2005-06" (PSC, 2006, p. 7).

As a part of the report, Georgia identified seven districts with significantly high percentages of teachers who were not highly qualified and another eleven that were experiencing challenges meeting their goals. Gwinnett County was not identified in either of these groups as only 5% of courses requiring a highly qualified teacher did not have one. Yet, because of the size of the district 5% of teachers in Gwinnett County

likely represented a greater number of teachers out of compliance than many of the identified smaller districts. The growth of Gwinnett County had significant implications for the implementation of the highly qualified policy.

### ***Economic Climate***

Long before GCPS developed Teach Gwinnett, the Georgia Professional Standards Commission supported the development of non-IHE-based alternative preparation. The shaky economic climate had resulted in the hiring of fewer teachers and declining teacher production from Georgia's IHEs in the 1990s (U.S. Department of Education, 2004a); however, by the end of the decade, a rebounding economy and growing student populations began to create substantial statewide teacher shortages (PSC-1). According to a report compiled by the U.S. Department of Education (2004a), by 1999, almost half of all new teachers hired in Georgia were being produced outside of the state.

Georgia experienced an economic downturn in the late 1990s, which led to a reduction in the numbers of teachers hired across the state. When the economy rebounded in the early 2000s and the population growth escalated, traditional route teacher production no longer met statewide demands. By the mid-2000s, districts were also beginning to experience the stress of implementing the federal highly qualified requirements, which made the challenge of putting a teacher in every classroom even more difficult. Not only did the federal government require that districts and states report the number and percentages of teachers working in core academic subjects without appropriate credentials, but also the new federal policy set the challenging expectation that all core academic teachers be designated as highly qualified by the end of the 2005-

06 school year. Specifically, the law restricted districts from using federal Title I funds to hire “teachers in targeted assistance Title I programs who [did] not meet the definition of ‘highly qualified’ ” (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p.4). In addition, Title I schools would no longer be allowed to hire teachers in any core subject area that did not meet highly qualified requirements. Any school districts that were found to be out of compliance could lose Title II funds (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). These consequences, along with the public nature of the reporting, elevated the districts’ and state’s attention to this requirement.

A 2008 report presented by the PSC demonstrated the unprecedented demand for teachers that the state was likely to face in the next several decades due to growth in population, the slow-growing levels of teacher production and policies limiting class size (Henson, 2008). In the late 1990s, 86,263 teachers were working in Georgia’s schools. By 2008, that number had jumped by 38% to 119,018. Workforce projections suggested that through a combination of attrition and growth, the state would need to add more than 28,000 new teachers by 2012. The report concluded not only that the number of teachers needed would continue to climb, but also that more than 10% of the current teaching population were not fully certified, a problem made more serious because of the additional pressures due to NCLB highly qualified requirements (Henson, 2008).

### ***Demand for Teachers in Georgia***

While the highly qualified requirements reflected the federal government’s efforts to influence the quality of teachers throughout the nation, No Child Left Behind also set ambitious goals for increasing student academic achievement. States were undoubtedly pursuing multiple strategies designed to support increased academic achievement,

including the reduction of class sizes. Some research on class size identified a relationship between the number of students in a class and achievement, as well as other positive outcomes (Achilles, 2012). The State Board of Education in Georgia adopted new regulations reducing the number of students allowed to be enrolled in one class or course in the state of Georgia in 2007 (PSC – 1). These new requirements increased demand for teachers across the state, but the impact was acutely felt in Gwinnett County, the state's largest school system. In addition to trying to meet the need for additional teachers caused by an increasing student population, the district had to cope with the state's new class size requirements, which also increased the numbers of teachers the district would need to employ to fill its classrooms. Although the introduction of highly qualified requirements exacerbated the demands presented by the changing economic climate and stagnant production numbers, the need for increased teacher production in Georgia had been identified years earlier.

## **Conclusion**

A few years into the implementation of the highly qualified policy and following the initial development of GaTAPP, the Executive Director of the Georgia Professional Standards Commission examined the production patterns of four pathways for teachers entering Georgia classrooms: alternate routes, teachers returning from absence, traditional programs, and teachers coming to Georgia from other states. An analysis of trend data suggested that the proportion of teachers entering classrooms through traditional routes was decreasing, while the share coming through alternative routes was increasing. In the 2006-07 school year, almost 23% of all new teachers came through an alternative route. According to the author of the report, each of the four pathways to

teaching would need to double current production numbers in order to meet the demand for teachers projected for 2012 (Henson, 2008). Although demand for more teachers would be felt across the state of Georgia, growth in Gwinnett County made the level of demand particularly acute. The highly qualified policy, the economic climate in Georgia and state leaders invested in Georgia's success set the stage for the development of a district-based teacher preparation program in the state's largest district. The expansion of non-IHE alternative teacher preparation in Georgia was in full swing.

## **Chapter 5**

### **The Gwinnett Factor**

The development of Teach Gwinnett did not come about until GaTAPP had been operating for several years. The district's choice to create the program initially resulted from growing demand for teachers, but quickly became a strategy for ensuring that educators already working in the district met the highly qualified requirements. Understanding the local context in which Teach Gwinnett developed is an important aspect of learning about the implementation of the highly qualified policy in Gwinnett County. In this chapter, I provide an analysis of the political and economic climate. In the following chapter, I focus more closely on the role of district culture.

#### **Gwinnett County**

Situated northeast of metro Atlanta, Gwinnett County covers a sprawling area of more than 400 square miles (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., b) and is home to more than 800,000 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d., a; Gwinnett County Government, n.d.). Over the last several decades, the area experienced tremendous growth. In 1990, just over 350,000 citizens called Gwinnett County home. By 2010 that number had more doubled (Gwinnett County Government, n.d.). The population boom reflects the county's desirable communities that offer affordable housing, a thriving job market, and access to public schools with an excellent reputation. As more and more families migrated to the county, the student body of the local school system grew, placing unprecedented demands on local education leaders.

Until recently, visitors driving north on I-85 were greeted by two tall water towers as they entered Gwinnett County. Painted in giant red letters one read *Gwinnett is Great*

and the other announced *Success Lives Here!* Although the symbolic, rusty water towers were torn down, making a splash with the local news media, the sentiment is still strong among the community members. People who live in the county refer to themselves as *Gwinnettians* and are proud to be members of the community. Not surprisingly, the community invests in the development of its own excellence. The Gwinnett County Chamber of Commerce supports an award-winning program called *Leadership Gwinnett*, which is designed to develop leaders across various sectors within the community. Alvin Wilbanks was a member of the first class to complete the leadership program in 1986 (Leadership Gwinnett, n.d.).

### **GCPS Culture**

The sense of identity in Gwinnett County Public Schools is a reflection of the larger community within the county. The pride of belonging to this county and this district was apparent throughout the data collection process. Time and time again, Teach Gwinnett participants shared stories about growing up in Gwinnett County and being proud of having attended high school in the district. Walking down the halls of the district offices, visitors are likely to encounter suit-clad employees. The unstated expectation is that staff, from administrative assistants to the superintendent, dress and act professionally at all times. The district works to standardize professionalism in many ways, including by issuing engraved nametags to all new employees; both gold and silver are provided so that outfits can be matched appropriately. Nametags bear the GCPS symbol: a torch. The torch itself symbolizes the belief that Gwinnett County will lead the way for education in Georgia by demonstrating best practices and continuous improvement.

Today, the district serves almost 169,000 students and employs approximately 11,000 teachers. For the 2013-14 school year, the district reported hiring 1,450 teachers of which 926 were new to the school system, 451 who worked part of the previous year, and 73 teachers who had previously been retired (Gwinnett County Public Schools [GCPS], n.d., a). In addition, the district reports that one out of five residents in the county is a GCPS student and that the district added more than 3,700 students for the 2013-14 school year (GCPS, n.d., a).

In 2007, local media reported that the growth of the school age population in GCPS was the fastest in not only Georgia, but also the entire Southeast United States (Moriarty, 2007). The explosion of the student population necessitated the growth of the GCPS teacher corps. In each of the three years immediately preceding the first year of implementation of Teach Gwinnett, GCPS hired more than 1,200 teachers due to attrition and new positions (Gwinnett, unpublished, n.d). This type of hiring demand was not surprising to district leaders, nor was it expected to diminish in the upcoming years. In the original proposal for Teach Gwinnett, submitted in the spring of 2008, district leaders forecast the need for at least 1,000 new teachers over the course of the next three academic years.

As previously noted, GCPS experienced a shortage of highly qualified teachers in many teaching assignments as the district grew in the mid-2000s. Senior leaders reported that the district employed a wide variety of strategies to ensure that all teacher vacancies were filled, including the hiring of provisionally-licensed teachers enrolled in alternative preparation programs. Although the district could hire teachers completing alternative route programs through Northwest RESA or any other approved alternative preparation



program, there were compelling reasons for the district to develop an in-house program.

Administrators reported being dissatisfied with the preparation offered through existing GaTAPP programs, and candidates complained about the inconvenience of a program that was not very close to home (GCPS-SL1, GCPS-SL2, GCPS-T13, GCPS-T14, GCPS-T16). One district leader described the problem while also suggesting that a locally developed program would be of superior quality:

I knew we needed an alternative preparation program to be able to prepare folk and to connect with special ed and to be able to train our own folk...I felt we could do a much more effective job, just knowing how great Gwinnett County does things. (GCPS-SL2)

According to district leaders, and verified in interviews with Teach Gwinnett participants, non-certified teachers and potential teacher-candidates indicated that existing alternative preparation programs offered elsewhere were simply too far away to offer a real option for individuals seeking certification. District leaders noted that there was untapped potential in their own “backyard,” claiming that there were many adults already working in schools or in the Gwinnett community who would love to become teachers if they could find a way to become licensed without having to jump through a series of cumbersome (and expensive) hoops (GCPS-SL1). When asked why the district decided to develop Teach Gwinnett, a staff member responded:

From my understanding, Gwinnett saw a need, and if anyone knows anything about Gwinnett, it's that we'd like to have our own programs. I think that traditionally, those who are alternatively certified were going through the Metro RESA Program, and so, I think it came to a point where we took a look at the

numbers and said, “It doesn’t make sense for folks to go elsewhere if we can have this at home,” and not only have it at home, but “Gwinnettize” it, so that all of the messages are consistent and coherent with the organization’s vision, mission, and goals. I think they probably said several times, you know, “We wanted to grow our own,”...Of course, it makes sense to have something at home. (GCPS-TG3)

Because of the sheer numbers of new teachers the district needed to staff its schools, district leaders perceived a need to develop new strategies for securing highly qualified teachers. A high-quality alternative pathway for individuals who were not interested in pursuing certification through a traditional preparation program seemed to offer a solution. In addition, leaders had a strong sense of the skills and values that they wanted new teachers to bring to the system, and believed that the district could do a better job than other alternative preparation programs of ensuring teachers were trained to be successful in Gwinnett County.

### ***Availability of Resources***

Although district leaders recognized a need, supporting the development of a brand new district-based alternative preparation program without the availability of significant resources would be impossible. During interviews with senior leaders in the district, one individual noted that part of the reason leaders were able to develop Teach Gwinnett was because they were eager to end an initiative designed to reduce class sizes. Although some research supports the benefits of smaller class sizes, growth in the district was making it impossible to reduce classes to sizes that district leaders believed would notably increase student learning.

The class-size reduction program was funded through federal Title II, Part A funds. The elimination of this strategy left a pool of funds not dedicated to any other project. When asked why the district started the program, one senior leader noted, “So I think the timing and all the pieces were right, and we were able to restructure some of our Title II, Part A monies to go in that direction and that’s how we started working on it” (GCPS – SL2). The Georgia State Department of Education (GaDOE) not only supported, but also encouraged, the decision because of the lack of success with this initiative across the state (GCPS-SL2). Ending the class-size reduction initiative enabled GCPS to reallocate the Title IIA funds that had been assigned for that purpose. Ultimately, district leaders decided to use the resource to address the growing problem of teacher shortages.

### **Proposing Teach Gwinnett**

By this time, the state’s model allowing non-IHE entities to prepare teachers through alternative programs had been in place for several years. Because of the demand for teachers, the need to reallocate Title IIA funds and the opportunity presented by the GaTAPP model, district leaders decided to embark on a new initiative to train their own teachers. Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS) applied for and was granted authorization to offer their own district-based teacher preparation program in 2007.

In the spring of 2008, the district submitted an institutional report on the development of the project plan for the program.<sup>7</sup> The project plan included a mission statement, which did not provide a statement about the specific purpose of the program, but rather redirected the reader to the GCPS Mission statement and the mission of the

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<sup>7</sup> This document was provided as the original proposal. In 2007, the district received approval to plan the program. This document is a report on outcomes of the development process and serves as the original project plan.

Department of Staff Development. The project plan suggested that the primary purpose of the program would be to support the success of the overall mission of the district (see Figure II), but stopped short of indicating specifically how the program would play a role in that success.

**Figure II. Mission of the GCPS TAPP Program**

The mission of the GCPS TAPP program is aligned with the larger mission of the school district..., however it achieves this mission with the organizational framework of the Department of Staff Development. Thus the TAPP program purposes, commitments, dispositions and activities are guided by the Department mission. (GCPS, 2008)

The institutional report clearly implied the reasons that GCPS wanted to develop and implement its own preparation program. The district forecast that student growth would continue at current rates, and anticipated that approximately 18,000 new students would be added to district rosters between the 2007-08 and 2010-11 school years. Consequently, the district projected adding slightly more than 1,000 new teaching positions over that same time. These projections did not consider how attrition and retirement might have an impact on the demand for teachers.

In the report, district leaders implied a desire to ensure that the teaching staff reflects the student body in terms of racial diversity, but the chief priority was ensuring that students have access to excellent teachers. The report identified strategies the district used to recruit a diverse pool of candidates, but did not indicate that there would be a specific recruiting plan designed specifically for the district-based teacher preparation program:

Our [the district] goal is not to meet a quota, but to seek top quality educators from all backgrounds, and to respect the ethnic differences of our students by striving to have a staff that reflects those differences...Once a clear picture of the students has been established, and a clear picture of our staff established, the logical next step is to disaggregate the previous year's hiring to measure our success in achieving equity while continuing to seek excellence. (GCPS, 2008)

With regard to recruitment and selection practices and expectations, the development report was notably short on detail. For instance, other than acknowledging the minimum state requirements (e.g., an undergraduate GPA of at least 2.5, passing scores on the Georgia Assessments for the Certification of Educators [GACE] and passing background checks), the report did not identify any additional selection criteria. The report did outline a vision for students of GCPS TAPP teachers (see Figure III). The statement is focused on TAPP teachers and indicates alignment of expectations for students of TAPP teachers with those outcomes achieved by all other students.

**Figure III. Vision for Students of GCPS TAPP Teachers**

TAPP teachers will be challenged to lead students to high achievement, and they will be evaluated by their mentors and supervisors with a focus on student learning. This focus matches the GCPS vision for students as well. TAPP teachers will work to assure that their students will have the same values and achievements listed above in the general GCPS vision for students. (GCPS, 2008)

The development report did not articulate any clear or measurable goals or objectives. Specifically, the report did not provide a goal regarding the number of participants to be enrolled and trained each year, nor were there specific expectations regarding the types of

teachers to be recruited and trained (e.g., special education, science and math).

Interviews with key stakeholders suggested that the initial purposes of the program were to focus on the recruitment of mid-career changers whose experiences would be highly valuable in hard-to-staff subject areas, such as science, math and special education (GCPS-SL2, GCPS-SL3). Program coordinators and designers envisioned recruiting and selecting outstanding participants who would then be supported in finding placement as a teacher within the district. After submitting the development plan to the PSC, Gwinnett County was allowed to begin to implement its new district-based teacher preparation program.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Teach Gwinnett**

Teach Gwinnett is a district-based alternative teacher preparation program located in Gwinnett County Public Schools in Georgia. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission outlines specific criteria to which each Georgia Teacher Alternative Preparation Program (GaTAPP) must adhere, including minimum eligibility criteria for candidate participation, required implementation of a candidate support team, and the use of the Charlotte Danielson Framework as a foundation for the preparation. In alignment with GaTAPP criteria, a Teach Gwinnett candidate must be employed as a teacher in one of the 120 GCPS schools, have passed state-required pedagogical and content assessments and hold an undergraduate degree with at a GPA of at least 2.5. Individuals who hold “a professional teaching certificate from Georgia or any other state” or “an expired Georgia teaching certificate” or who “received a grade in a student teaching course or equivalent at a college during the past five years” are not eligible for the program (Teach Gwinnett, Alternative Teacher Preparation, Candidate Handbook (GCPS, 2011, p.2). Candidates are issued a “non-renewable, non-professional certificate” during program enrollment (PSC, n.d.). Upon successful completion of the program, candidates qualify for “a professional teaching certificate issued by the state of Georgia” Gwinnett County Public Schools, 2011, p.2). The requirements are primarily structural in nature and provide generous opportunity for program-level customization.

While the structure of the Teach Gwinnett program is based on the minimum expectations for all GaTAPP programs, the content and delivery of the program are designed to support the district’s efforts to assimilate new teachers into the culture of

Gwinnett County Public Schools. Specifically, Teach Gwinnett reinforces the district culture by presenting a conceptual framework for the program that is aligned to district priorities. This alignment creates an immediate connection between the preparation program and the work of the district. In addition, the use of locally-developed curricula focused on the development of candidates' knowledge of local student standards and district-supported teaching strategies and implementation of locally-developed assessments ensures that candidates are focused on learning what to teach and how to teach in direct alignment with district expectations. Perhaps most importantly, the program primarily relies on local practitioners for program implementation and delivery of coursework. By doing this, there is greater likelihood that the program offerings reflect the expectations and culture of the district.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The Candidate Handbook (handbook) offers a conceptual framework that outlines the vision for the types of teachers prepared through Teach Gwinnett and describes how that vision connects to the overall vision and mission of the district (see Figure IV).

**Figure IV. Vision and Mission of Gwinnett County Public Schools**

#### **Vision**

Gwinnett County Public Schools will become a system of world-class schools where students acquire the knowledge and skills to be successful as they continue their education at the postsecondary level and/or enter the workforce

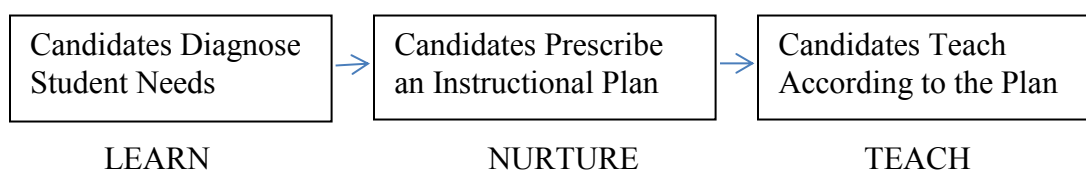
#### **Mission**

The mission of Gwinnett County Public Schools is to pursue excellence in academic knowledge, skills, and behavior for each student, resulting in measured improvement against local, national, and world-class standards.



Even at this most conceptual level, Teach Gwinnett is designed to ensure that candidates begin to internalize the expectation of what it means to be an educator in Gwinnett County. The handbook indicates that candidates will become “Diagnostic and Prescriptive Teachers” (GCPS, 2011, p.4), and explains that ***Diagnostic*** teachers are those who “assess student needs, including current levels of knowledge, learning styles, cultural backgrounds, family circumstances, and special abilities” (p. 4). ***Prescriptive*** teachers are those who “act on knowledge gained from diagnosis, design instruction and strategies to deliver it, and assess the results of the teaching process” (p.4). Furthermore, the handbook indicates that “candidates must **Learn, Teach, and Nurture** – the daily actions which guide teachers as they achieve the skills described by the conceptual framework” (p.4). The handbook illustrates how these concepts are connected (see Figure V).

**Figure V. Teach Gwinnett Conceptual Framework**



The handbook states that candidates who complete the Teach Gwinnett program “will teach effectively and lead students to their highest potentials” and reiterates that the “conceptual framework is designed to support the overall vision and mission of Gwinnett County Public Schools” (p.4). When asked to describe what it means to be an effective educator in Gwinnett County, a Teach Gwinnett staff member noted specifically that an effective teacher has:

Awareness of...students, and who they are, and what they're bringing to the table, and how that impacts their learning. I would say...diagnostic and prescriptive. You know, it's kind of equated to when you go into the doctor, you don't just say I'm sick and then they prescribe you meds. They probe and they find out what exactly is wrong with you, and then they determine the best course of action. And I felt like that's, as teachers, that's what we should do. We should figure out what works best for our students, and then work with them in that capacity (GCPS-TG2).

Educators throughout the district are expected to be able to use data to understand student needs, identify a plan for providing appropriate instruction and execute that plan. Not only is there clarity about the general approach to the instructional process, but the district has identified specific teaching strategies that all educators are expected to use.

Quality-Plus Teaching Strategies are a collection of practices that the district endorses. The handbook introduces candidates to the Quality-Plus Teaching Strategies and states, “All Teach Gwinnett Candidates are required to use these 13 Quality-Plus Teaching Strategies in their instruction” (GCPS, 2011, p.29-30). The handbook serves as the new candidate’s first introduction to the culture of the district by highlighting district values and introducing the district’s definition of what it means to be an effective teacher in GCPS.

### **Program of Study**

Teach Gwinnett requires that all participants attend a two-week Summer Institute, the *Essentials of Effective Teaching*. The Summer Institute is composed of a series of mini-courses designed to provide training related to pedagogical strategies and

management techniques to the newly minted teachers. The Teach Gwinnett Candidate Handbook outlines additional courses that may be required for candidates including, “Best Practices Seminars, New Special Education Teacher Training, Teaching of Reading (Early Childhood, Middle Grades, and Special Education), and any additional coursework as deemed necessary by the program coordinator or support team” (Gwinnett County Public Schools, 2011, p.10). Although the titles of these courses may sound like courses that could be found in any preparation program, the training is designed to help educators understand what it means to be a successful teacher in Gwinnett County. Throughout the program, the coursework is grounded in local student standards and teaching strategies espoused by the district.

Generally, all program participants, regardless of teaching assignment, attend the same best practice seminars. Conversations with program staff revealed that some program participants complained about this approach and suggested that courses were often misaligned with their needs (GCPS-TG1, GCPS-TG-2). In particular, candidates teaching at the middle level felt that the focus on literacy instruction was geared toward early readers and not appropriately suited for supporting teachers working with older struggling readers. Beyond meeting minimal expectations required by the state, the program appeared to have little training focused on developing educator content knowledge or content-specific pedagogy. Only candidates teaching in special education were consistently required to take additional training related to their teaching assignment. Program staff acknowledged the misalignment and indicated that they were searching for ways to address these concerns.

## Observation and Assessment

Candidate assessment, a central component of the Teach Gwinnett program, is comprised of multiple types of evidence. Although the specific requirements have changed over time, candidates from each cohort were observed and evaluated frequently. School-based mentors, assigned as an element of the Teach Gwinnett program, observe candidates at least four times. Program supervisors are required to observe candidates at least six times over the course of two semesters. These observations are documented using the Clinical Practice Observation (CPO) form. The CPO is a rubric focused on Domain 2 and Domain 3 of the Charlotte Danielson *Framework for Teaching* (Gwinnett County Public Schools, 2011, pp.13-15).

The *Framework*, composed of four domains (planning and preparation, the classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities), is a rubric-based system widely used for evaluating teacher practice. Teachers are awarded one of four ratings (unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, distinguished) on each component within the domain. Domains 2 and 3 focus on classroom environment and instructional practice and are to be conducted when new material is being delivered or material recently taught is being reviewed. “To do well on this evaluation the candidate must develop strategies of instruction, including planning for different learning styles and for teaching students of different cultures” (GCPS, 2011, p.34). Candidates are required to demonstrate proficiency in order to successfully complete the program.

A second assessment, the Learning Unit Assessment, evaluates Domains 1 and 3 of the Charlotte Danielson *Framework for Teaching* by examining an entire unit of instruction designed by the candidate. Teach Gwinnett expects candidates to demonstrate

an ability to develop plans that utilize the GCPS standardized format and demonstrate “a variety of teaching strategies, including, but not limited to the Gwinnett County Quality-Plus Teaching Strategies” (GCPS, 20-11, p.37). Although the candidate submits two units, only the second is evaluated.

In conjunction with the second unit, evaluators also complete a Student Learning Evidence Evaluation (SLEE). This form assesses the candidate’s performance on Domain 3. The purpose of the SLEE is to analyze “how well candidate teaching induces learning” (GCPS, 2011, p.40) and requires that candidates provide evaluators with a class roster, a student performance template, and an assessment item analysis. The form for this assessment is centered on the candidate’s understanding of how to measure student learning against the Academic Knowledge and Skills (AKS), Gwinnett County’s locally-developed student standards.

Finally, the Professional Dispositions Inventory (PDI) is used to assess “expected professional behaviors of candidates,” Domain 4 on Charlotte Danielson’s *Framework for Teaching*. “Professional behaviors measured in this assessment include Professional Responsibility, Collaboration, Valuing Diversity, Professional Behavior, and Personal Well-Being” (p.45). Although the assessment of professional dispositions is required by GaTAPP, GCPS prides itself on professional behavior and conduct.

In addition to being observed multiple times using each of these templates, Teach Gwinnett candidates must also complete a web-based electronic portfolio that provides evidence of competency across all domains of the Danielson framework. The portfolio is comprised of 23 components. Each component has multiple parts and requires documented evidence and a narrative explanation. The handbook indicates that “[a]ll

portfolio submissions should be comparable to graduate-level assignments and will be evaluated for accuracy, quality, and thoroughness at that level” (GCPSIs, 2011, p.42).

Although the district had significant control over the creation and implementation of assessment tools, the GaTAPP requirements stipulated that candidates must be evaluated against the Danielson Framework. While the candidate handbook and the program of study appeared to have a tight connection with district priorities and standardized practices, the assessments were less clearly connected. There is significant overlap between the practices described in the Quality-Plus Teaching Strategies and the Danielson Framework, but I found no evidence suggesting that there had been an attempt to align the documents.

### **Strategic Staffing**

The execution of a district-based alternative preparation program requires significant human resources. By electing to staff the program with existing members of the organization, a district can maintain strict oversight of the delivery of content, as well as the supervision and assessment of candidate progress in ways that tightly align with the priorities and expectations of the district. The majority of individuals engaged in the preparation of Teach Gwinnett candidates are full-time district employees. The only exception is the use of two supervisors who have had no direct affiliation with the district other than in this capacity. These street-level bureaucrats made decisions throughout the implementation of the program that affected the quality of educators working in Gwinnett County Public Schools. As the staff who were responsible for validating a candidate’s successful completion of the program, these individuals truly defined what it meant to be highly qualified.

### ***Teach Gwinnett Staff***

Teach Gwinnett requires a staff of four full-time district employees: the program coordinator, two program staff, and one administrative assistant. Between the second and third cohorts, the program hired two former GCPS teachers to work for the program on a full-time basis. The two program staff members serve as candidate supervisors and are responsible for designing and delivering the majority of the program's coursework. These staff members were selected for these positions based on their success as GCPS teachers. Beginning in 2010, these two staff members, along with the new program coordinator, updated the syllabi and course requirements for Teach Gwinnett and delivered most of the instruction of candidates in the summer institute and during the academic year.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the program contracts with three individuals who serve as supervisors. Among the supervisors is a part-time GCPS assistant principal, a faculty member from a local technical college, and a former executive director of professional learning from a neighboring district. Along with the supervisor, the school-based faculty members form a candidate support team.

### ***Candidate Support Teams***

As required of all GaTAPP programs, Teach Gwinnett provides each candidate with a Candidate Support Team (CST). Each team is comprised of a school-based mentor, school-based supervisor and a Teach Gwinnett supervisor. Each member of the CST works with the candidate to support the candidate's development of skills and competencies that are measured using the Charlotte Danielson Framework, a required

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<sup>8</sup> Although there is some limited documentation, evidence about the content of coursework prior to the 2010 redesign is limited. The former program coordinator left the district in the spring of 2010. Much of the historical knowledge of the program was lost at that time.

part of all GaTAPP programs. The roles and responsibilities of the members of the CST were clearly outlined in the report prepared for the PSC.

The CST meets as a group at least twice each year to assess the performance of the candidate. During these meetings, the team determines areas that need improvement and areas of strength. In order to successfully complete the program, candidates must demonstrate proficiency on each component of the rubric associated with the Danielson Framework. Based on the final assessment, a candidate could be recommended for full licensure, recommended for a second year in Teach Gwinnett or recommended for dismissal from the program. Program leaders report that, instead of letting unsuccessful candidates get to the point of being dismissed at the end of the year, they make every effort to counsel those candidates to decide on their own to leave the program.

Interviewed candidates varied widely in their response to questions about engagement with the CST. Some candidates reported meeting with the entire team several times during the course of the year and receiving feedback about the performance (GCPS-T2, GCPS-T8). Other candidates indicated little knowledge of the activities of the CST and had no formal opportunities to receive feedback from the entire group (GCPS-P1, GCPS-P12, GCPS-P13). Supervisors indicated that variance in candidate support teams often stemmed from the level of engagement of other team members. One supervisor provided detailed descriptions of how CSTs operated differently according to the needs of the candidate and other factors within the school. She indicated that when a non-English native candidate was struggling to communicate with students that the candidate support team and additional school leaders engaged in the effort to provide additional support. At another school, she described having difficulty getting the school-



based supervisor, who she indicated was overwhelmed, to respond even to emails (GCPS – S1).

### ***Mentors***

Although the CST works together to support and evaluate the candidate, each member carries out a specific role. In the original proposal, roles and responsibilities for each member are clearly defined. The school-based mentor should primarily serve in a supportive role; working closely with the candidate to examine instructional practice, parental engagement and classroom management and helping the candidate to “collect evidence that s/he has met the competencies required by the program (Gwinnett County Public Schools, 2008, p.79)”. In addition, the mentor may also help to familiarize the candidate with school and district culture and operations.

All Teach Gwinnett candidates are required to have a mentor regardless of how long the candidate may have been teaching in the district. The same is not true for all new teachers. Even though GCPS does not have a formal induction process, many schools assign mentors to new teachers. According to district policy, new mentor teachers are required to attend a district-run training session. Teach Gwinnett mentors are invited, but not required, to attend these sessions.

According to candidates, engagement with mentors varied significantly. Some educators indicated that their mentor support was significant (GCPS-P14). One participant even noted that the person serving as her mentor had been working in that capacity informally before the candidate joined Teach Gwinnett. She went on to say that the support from an on-site mentor was an important part of the process for her (GCPS-P16). In other instances, candidates reflected that their mentors were only minimally

helpful (GCPS-12, GCPS-20). Overall, candidates' reflections on mentor engagement suggested that program oversight of expectations for matching and relationship building between the candidate and the mentor was minimal. This is an aspect of the program that may have failed to support the assimilation of candidates into the district culture.

### ***School-Based Administrator***

According to the original proposal, the school-based administrator should serve primarily in an evaluative role and promote Teach Gwinnett as a valuable program. In addition to recommending the candidate for participation in Teach Gwinnett, school-based administrators are expected to communicate with other staff members about “the importance of GA TAPP [sic] and setting the positive, supportive tone that ensure a successful field experience[, and to solicit] the support of the entire faculty” to support the candidate’s entry into the school, to observe and evaluate candidates as part of the regular evaluation process for all educators, to arrange for the release time required to allow candidates the opportunity to observe other teachers, and to offer feedback to program staff regarding the candidate’s performance (Gwinnett County Public Schools, 2008, p. 80). This description of the role of the administrator reflects the district’s efforts to standardize practice. In addition, school-based leaders have the authority to determine whether a candidate will be rehired at the end of the school year; however, there was no evidence to suggest that this happened.

### ***Supervisor***

Teach Gwinnett supervisors are assigned by the Teach Gwinnett staff. Multiple supervisors are hired each year although the total number of supervisors has declined over time. In 2011-12, the program only contracted with three external supervisors. In

prior years, the program had employed as many as seven supervisors. Program leaders indicated that having fewer supervisors allows for a more cohesive set of expectations for all candidates and better opportunity to address the need for inter-rater reliability across observation instruments. Supervisors participate in training designed to ensure that they each implement the evaluation of candidates with fidelity and that they clearly understand all of the requirements of the Teach Gwinnett program.

Each supervisor works with a small group of candidates<sup>9</sup>, and is required to conduct at least three observations, discuss with the candidates the competencies that they are required to meet, and ensure that records are maintained appropriately. In addition, supervisors work closely with program staff to alert them if there are concerns or problems with a candidate's progress.

### **Fiscal Resources**

The Teach Gwinnett program requires substantial time and effort to support the complex implementation of the program. As previously noted, financial support for the program is made available through federal Title II, Part A funding. In the 2011 fiscal year, the district received just over \$3 million through Title II, Part A Improving Teacher Quality. I requested, but did not receive, specific information about budgets provided for recruitment and hiring. The district does support five directors of staffing who are tasked with ensuring that schools hire appropriate personnel.

The district provided very limited information regarding the budget for Teach Gwinnett. I received two separate documents from different district leaders for the Teach Gwinnett budget for the 2010-11 school year. One budget, which appeared to be a more

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<sup>9</sup> The small groups ranged from 10 to 18 candidates. The two GCPS staff members who were hired to work on Teach Gwinnett full-time have more candidates assigned to them than the external consultants hired to serve as supervisors.

formal document, included items that were clearly not related to the implementation of Teach Gwinnett, such as the salaries of staff members who worked on other programs that were unrelated to Teach Gwinnett.<sup>10</sup> The best estimate that I could calculate from this document suggested that the program budget for 2010-11 totaled approximately \$473,772. This figure includes salaries for four full-time staff members, materials and supplies, technology costs related to the maintenance of the online portfolios, course instructors and consultants, release time for field observations and a set amount designated as other purchased services. Salaries and release time represent the largest share of the budget, and are likely to be fairly consistent across years. In addition to the costs covered by the district, each candidate pays \$1,200, which goes directly to the mentor assigned to the candidate support team. The other document, prepared by Teach Gwinnett staff, provided a total budget of \$591,913, which included mentor stipends.

Assuming an annual budget of approximately \$500,000, I estimate the district spends about \$5,400 per candidate. While the budget might seem large when considering cost per candidate, this amount is merely a small portion of the budget of the entire school district which has fluctuated between \$1.2-\$18 billion over the last several years (Badertscher, 2012). The Teach Gwinnett budget represents less than one half of one percent of the overall working budget of the district. Recent reductions in the GCPS budget have not resulted in the elimination of the program (Reddy, 2012). In combination, the human and fiscal resources that the district devotes to the program are significant. The continued support of the program suggests that the district is invested in maintaining this pathway for certifying its own teachers.

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<sup>10</sup> I am not suggesting that the district did not have complete financial records; however, I was not able to obtain copies of that information.

## Program Profile

The original proposal for a district-based teacher preparation program implied a connection to the need for a more diverse teaching force. To gauge whether Teach Gwinnett candidates are supporting efforts to diversify the teaching force, I compiled a profile of program participants. Twice each year, the district takes a snapshot of personnel data that is used for state and federal reporting purposes. These data snapshots, in conjunction with Teach Gwinnett data, were used as the primary data sources to consider how Teach Gwinnett candidates compare and contrast with other teachers. I analyzed the cohorts in comparison to the entire teaching population and to novice teachers. Making a comparison against novice teachers is of limited use as most Teach Gwinnett candidates were not novices at the point of enrollment in the program.

Gwinnett County Public Schools experienced a dramatic decrease in the number of teachers hired for the first time in the fall of 2008, the same year that Teach Gwinnett enrolled its first cohort. Between 2005 and 2007, the district data indicate that more than 1,200 new teachers were hired at the beginning of each school year. Yet, in 2008, this number drops to 20.<sup>11</sup> Hiring rebounds somewhat in 2009 with 418 new hires and in 2010 with 448 new hires. Of the 278 Teach Gwinnett candidates, only 17 appear to have been enrolled at the same time that they were initially hired. Of those, none were a part of the first cohort in the fall of 2008, 13 candidates were hired at the time of program enrollment for the 2009 cohort and only four were new hires for the 2010 cohort.

Another ten Teach Gwinnett candidates appear in the GCPS personnel data as new teachers only one semester prior to enrolling in Teach Gwinnett. This data suggest that

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<sup>11</sup> Although multiple checks of the district's data system indicate that only 20 teachers were hired in 2008, it is possible that some teachers newly hired that year were miscoded. Even so, the rate of hiring clearly fell sharply relative to previous years.

the demand for teachers in Gwinnett County declined just as Teach Gwinnett was started. Instead of recruiting new teachers, the program enrolled candidates who had already been working in the district.

Alternative preparation programs are designed to attract individuals who did not complete undergraduate or post-baccalaureate teacher training programs. It is reasonable, therefore, to expect that new teachers entering the district through Teach Gwinnett might be older, on average, than educators entering the district through more traditional pathways. The district did not maintain records that identify type of preparation pathway completed by a teacher, but statewide data demonstrate that the majority of new teachers being prepared in Georgia still matriculate through traditional programs (Henson, 2008).

The Teach Gwinnett program consistently enrolled higher percentages of minority teachers as compared to the population of all teachers in the district (see Table I). Notably, the proportion of Teach Gwinnett candidates who were African-American was almost double that of the proportion of all teachers working in Gwinnett County Public Schools. The proportion of white candidates was also consistently smaller by approximately 20 percentage points than the total population of teachers working in Gwinnett County.

**Table I. Comparing the percentage of racial/ethnic representation of teachers enrolled in Teach Gwinnett with those identified as belonging to the GCPS total teacher population**

Race/Ethnicity	Cohort Comparison					
	2008-09		2009-10		2010-11	
	TG	Non-TG	TG	Non-TG	TG	Non-TG
Asian	7.8%	2.4%	1.0%	2.3%	3.5%	2.3%
African-American	26.7%	14.8%	31.4%	14.6%	29.1%	15.0%
Hispanic	4.4%	2.0%	5.9%	2.1%	7.0%	1.8%
Native American	1.1%	0.2%	1.0%	0.2%	0.0%	0.2%
Multiracial	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	0.0%
White	60.0%	80.6%	60.8%	80.7%	59.3%	80.7%
Other				0.1%		0.1%

In addition to having a more racially diverse group of teachers than the overall teaching population, males were represented at higher rates among Teach Gwinnett candidates than the overall teaching staff working in Gwinnett County Public Schools (see Table II). The percentage of male candidates remained fairly stable across Teach Gwinnett cohorts.

**Table II. Comparing the gender of teachers enrolled in Teach Gwinnett with those identified as belonging to the GCPS total teacher population**

Gender	Cohort Comparison					
	2008-09		2009-10		2010-11	
	TG	Non-TG	TG	Non-TG	TG	Non-TG
Male	32.5%	18.3%	33.2%	18.9%	34.8%	19.4%
Female	67.5%	81.7%	66.8%	81.0%	65.2%	80.6%

During an informal conversation, one district leader raised concerns that Teach Gwinnett might have been used to support the certification of individuals who were working as athletic coaches in some schools. During an observation of the first day of the summer institute, I noted that at least three male candidates introduced themselves as a teacher and an athletic coach. District leaders and Teach Gwinnett staff, both formally through interviews and during informal conversation, indicated that the practice of hiring individuals primarily for the purpose of coaching was not supported and that school leaders were instructed to make personnel hiring decisions based on their perception of the individuals' abilities to perform as effective instructors (GCPS-SL1, GCPS-SL3). Most of the other candidates that I interviewed provided fairly typical stories about how they found their teaching position. Many of them were already employed in the district as paraprofessionals or were already teaching without appropriate credentials. The following example, though, illustrates the varied pressures administrators feel and how strategic they must be when staffing their schools.

Among the 20 teachers interviewed for this study, one candidate indicated that he believed that he had been hired specifically for his ability to serve as a coach. In fact, he stated that his first interviews were with athletic directors at the school rather than the principal (GCPS-P5). The candidate went on to express concern about having been hired to teach in a special education setting. When asked how he felt about being hired to teach special education, he remarked:

Conflicted would be the best way to put it...And how am I qualified, just because I've taken and passed a GACE test? I mean, I ... it's like I'm qualified because I took a test and passed it, and we all know taking a test and passing it doesn't



demonstrate competency whatsoever. But it gets to show that you at least understand something. So, I felt conflicted about it, because I was getting into something I knew little about, and yet I needed to take the position because I hadn't been offered any other positions. At the end of the interview, we both raised the topic of how do we accomplish...certification, because I knew from all the other conversations that I'd had that I...had to have a starting point for being highly qualified...I'd taken the Special Ed GACE...because coaching and Special Education ... is the best skeleton key. (GCPS-P5)

Candidates enrolled in Teach Gwinnett are more diverse than other novice teachers and all other teachers in terms of gender and ethnic/racial identification. Teach Gwinnett candidates are not dissimilar from all other teachers in terms of average age, but are noticeably older, on average, than other novice teachers.

### ***Program Enrollment and Completion***

The first Teach Gwinnett cohort started in the summer of 2008 with 90 participants. The following year, 102 participants joined the program and in 2010 an additional 86 individuals were enrolled in the third cohort of the district-based teacher preparation program. The program is designed so that it can be completed in one year, but the measure of successful completion is meeting expected standards on a set of competencies rather than a specific timeline. Candidates who do not meet expectations in the first year are eligible to continue for an additional year if they remain employed as a teacher-of-record in the school system. Limitations of the data quality made it quite difficult to precisely analyze the numbers of candidates who successfully completed the program. Teach Gwinnett staff maintained some paper records and electronic reports

submitted to the PSC. The best way to assess whether a candidate successfully completed the program was to examine the level of license held by a teacher. Most Teach Gwinnett candidates appear as having moved from a provisional to a professional license following the completion of the Teach Gwinnett program. However, job codes and historical job placement data suggest that a few individuals who appeared on the Teach Gwinnett rosters were never placed as teachers, a clear requirement of enrollment in Teach Gwinnett. Although there are some challenges associated with the quality of the data, most of those teachers identified as Teach Gwinnett candidates appear to have successfully completed the program according to license codes and placement data.

Of the 278 candidates initially enrolled in Teach Gwinnett between 2008 and 2010, 225 exited the program after one year; 52 were enrolled for two years and 1 individual was reported as being enrolled for three years.<sup>12</sup> Each year, district staff compiled a spreadsheet to provide data on program participants that included information about successful completion, field of preparation and limited demographic data. The first report submitted to the PSC indicated that 40 candidates successfully completed the program in the spring of 2009. The report submitted after the second year of implementing Teach Gwinnett indicated that 94 candidates successfully completed the program, while 12 individuals were reported as not having completed the program. It was unclear from that PSC report whether these candidates remained enrolled in the program. By the end of July 2011, another 77 candidates had successfully completed the program, while 23 were listed as non-completers. These reports indicate that 211 candidates successfully completed the program by July 2011. Some candidates may have

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<sup>12</sup> The program coordinator indicated that the person who appeared as having been enrolled for three consecutive years had been dealing with personal health issues that prevented the individual from being able to complete the program within the generally accepted period.

remained enrolled in the program beyond that year. Candidates produced through the Teach Gwinnett program represent only a small portion of the total number of new teachers hired each year. Table III shows the increase in the number of newly-hired teachers working in the district between 2002 and 2007. Following the significant hiring that resulted in over 2,000 new teachers in the fall of 2007, the need for new teachers declined dramatically.

**Table III. New Teacher Hires**

First Semester Hired as Teacher	New Teacher Hires			Percent of Total Teach Gwinnett
	All Other	Teach Gwinnett	Total	
Pre-Spring 2002 <sup>13</sup>	14,235	10	14,246	0%
Spring 2002	168	3	171	2%
Fall 2002	1,120	3	1,123	0%
Spring 2003	108	0	108	0%
Fall 2003	1,028	5	1,033	0%
Spring 2004	180	4	184	2%
Fall 2004	1,263	8	1,271	1%
Spring 2005	202	5	207	2%
Fall 2005	1,285	18	1,303	1%
Spring 2006	219	13	232	6%
Fall 2006	1,414	22	1,436	2%
Spring 2007	199	11	210	5%
Fall 2007	2,159	117	2,276	5%
Spring 2008	197	1	198	1%
Fall 2008	18	2	20	10%
Spring 2009	83	8	91	9%
Fall 2009	390	28	418	7%
Spring 2010	82	5	87	6%
Fall 2010	444	4	448	1%
Spring 2011	82	0	82	0%
<b>Total<sup>14</sup></b>	<b>10,641</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>10,898</b>	<b>2%</b>

<sup>13</sup> The database used for this work only includes accurate data regarding this information that dates back to October 2001. Everyone hired prior to October 2001 is identified as hired in Fall 2001. For that reason, the number of teachers identified as first-time hires in Fall 2001 is erroneously elevated.

<sup>14</sup> Total does not include the 10 teachers who were hired as teachers before spring 2002.

According to estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau, Gwinnett County experienced yearly growth rates that fluctuated between 3.3% -4.0% from 2000 to 2006. In 2007, the estimated rate of growth dropped to 3.1% and continued to decline. By 2010, the estimated rate of growth was just over 1.1%.<sup>15</sup> Although there is no way to draw a direct correlation between the declining population growth and the need for fewer teachers, it is not unreasonable to suspect that these two events are related. In all likelihood, the district overestimated the continued growth trajectory, and possibly hired more teachers than needed in 2007, which resulted in a diminished need for teachers in subsequent years. This set of events likely contributed to the use of Teach Gwinnett as a program primarily used to certify teachers already working within the system rather than a program designed to recruit new teachers.

Gwinnett County Public Schools has invested significant resources in the development and implementation of the Teach Gwinnett program. The program is designed to meet the minimum requirements set out by the state of Georgia and support district efforts to ensure that all teachers are highly qualified, but also customizes preparation to ensure that candidates are familiar with district priorities, standardized practices, and a culture of lofty expectations. The next chapter examines how Teach Gwinnett reflects the culture of the district and attempts to reinforce the district's strong internal culture. In addition, I consider how this affects the implementation of the highly qualified policy.

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<sup>15</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.) Intercensal Estimates of the Resident Population for Counties and States: April 1, 2000-July 1, 2010. Retrieved September 20, 2013 from <http://www.census.gov/popest/data/intercensal/county/files/CO-EST00INT-TOT.csv>.

## **Chapter 7**

### **The Gwinnett Way**

In recent years, Gwinnett County students have consistently out-performed students from other Georgia districts (District Fact Sheet, 2014; District Fact Sheet, 2010). In 2010, and again in 2014, the district won the Broad Prize for Excellence in Urban Education. In its announcement about the 2014 winners, the Broad Foundation cited Gwinnett's success in attaining overall student achievement and closing achievement gaps: "A greater percentage of low-income students are reaching advanced academic levels in Gwinnett County than in other districts in Georgia" and "A greater percentage of black students are reaching advanced academic levels in Gwinnett County than in other districts in Georgia" (Broad Foundation, For First Time, 2014). In addition, the foundation highlighted critical factors that they linked to the district's success, including highly effective leadership and the strong organizational capacity (District Fact Sheet, 2014; District Fact Sheet, 2010).

In the years preceding these successes, GCPS had begun to implement NCLB requirements, including the highly qualified policy. By 2008, the district had engaged in the development of its district-based teacher preparation program, Teach Gwinnett. The intersection of these two events offers an opportunity to explore how the culture of the district influenced the implementation of the highly qualified policy. I first describe the culture of the district, and then analyze how the district's culture influenced the implementation of the highly qualified policy.

## District Culture

Culture is how things are understood by a group of people working together to accomplish something, or more simply stated “the way we do things around here” (Deal & Kennedy, 1983, p.14; Schein, 2010). The culture of an organization reflects “external adaptation and internal integration” and is “taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel” about how to conduct the work (Schein, 2010, p.18). The limited research examining how district culture influences implementation suggests that districts with strong leadership and organizational capacity are more equipped to produce successful outcomes than their counterparts (Corcoran & Lawrence, 2003; Firestone, 1989). Strong leaders ensure that districts have a clear focus, including a shared understanding of the mission, vision and values of the district. In addition, effective leaders align goals and expectations with policies and practices. Finally, strong leaders understand the value of developing schools and staff that have the capacity to meet the clearly defined expectations. In addition to effective leadership, districts must have the organizational capacity, including both human and fiscal resources, to develop and implement effective practices aligned with clearly defined goals (Corcoran & Lawrence, 2003; Firestone, 1989). Effective district leadership and significant organizational capacity played a critical role in the successes experienced by GCPS.

In Gwinnett County Public Schools, the culture is so pervasive and well-understood that it has earned its own moniker, *The Gwinnett Way*. As a former GCPS employee, I experienced the culture of the district first-hand. For the purposes of this work, I collected evidence by interviewing faculty and staff, reviewing documents and data generated by the district, and analyzing information from media reports. As a result,

I identified several key aspects of district culture that influenced the implementation of Teach Gwinnett related to effective leadership and organizational capacity. In this section, I highlight how district level leaders leveraged organizational capacity and effective leadership to develop a strong internal culture that has led to shared success.

### ***Organizational Capacity – Human Resources***

In spite of challenging economic pressures and remarkable growth of the student population, Gwinnett County students have consistently out-performed students from other Georgia districts. The role of leadership in this pursuit has been made clear with the often repeated statement, “Everything rises and falls on leadership.” This quote, and several others related to role of leadership, are well known and repeated by leaders throughout district. Certainly, the role of leadership is viewed as an important aspect of most school systems. In GCPS, however, the idea of the critical role of leadership is literally translated into a shared core value (see Figure VI).

Figure VI. Message from the Superintendent on the GCPS Vision for Leadership.

*“Everything rises and falls on leadership.”* This maxim holds true for any size or type of organization— Fortune 500 company, healthcare system, bank, local government, religious institution, retail franchise... you name it. Leadership is the fundamental element that can drive an organization to phenomenal success; lack of leadership can anchor it solidly in mediocrity, or worse. After more than 40 years in education, I am certain that this principle also holds true for schools and school systems. In fact, quite a bit of research validates the correlation. Numerous studies on what makes a school successful say that the single, most-important factor is the effectiveness of the principal as the instructional leader. (GCPS website, 2013).

GCPS has devoted substantial time and resources to build a strong leadership team. The district sponsors regular meetings with school leaders to ensure consistent messaging and shared understanding of policies, programs and results across the district.

Leadership meetings are held in the district's massive board room which is situated in the center of the central office building, known as the Instructional Support Center (ISC).

The ISC is an impressive two-wing building that houses approximately 500 central office employees. Awards and accolades received by the district are on display outside the board room.

In addition to the regular informational meetings, school leaders regularly participate in day-long sessions designed to support their understanding and use of district-, school- and student-level data. Each summer, the district hosts a leadership conference that offers customized professional development for district leaders. Sessions focus on topics, such as district-approved instructional practices and strategies for using data to inform instruction. These sessions support the district's efforts to standardize practices across the district. The conference is also used as a way to develop collegiality that supports the growth of shared beliefs and values. During my tenure with the district, leaders were divided into teams, each of which represented one of the strategic priorities. Leaders were encouraged to exhibit district spirit by wearing colors associated with their assigned strategic priority and to compete against other teams in competitions that focused on knowledge of the district. Although there has been an emphasis on developing strong leaders at all levels of the district, members of the senior leadership team and the school board have been key factors in the district's success.

The superintendent and most members of the school board have been in place for at least a decade. Although the demographic characteristics of residents of Gwinnett County and students enrolled in GCPS schools have become more diverse, the all-white members of the school board continue to be re-elected. Among the five board members,



only one has been on the board for fewer than ten years. In fact, Louise Radloff has served since 1973, which makes her the second longest serving board member in Georgia (Badertscher & Joyner, 2012). Her service has been so appreciated that the district has named a school in her honor. The stability of the school board has created the opportunity for district leaders to develop a focused approach, which had led to greater coherence in practice and shared beliefs and values.

Most school districts of the size of Gwinnett County are lucky to hold on to senior leaders for even a few years. J. Alvin Wilbanks has served as chief executive officer and superintendent of schools of Gwinnett County Public Schools since 1996. He entered this position as an established member of the local community. Prior to leading GCPS, Wilbanks served as the president of Gwinnett Technical College, while simultaneously working as the assistant superintendent of human resources and continuous improvement for the district (GCPS website, n.d., J. Alvin Wilbanks, CEO/Superintendent). Wilbanks has earned multiple accolades for his effective leadership, including being selected as the “2005 Georgia Superintendent of the Year” and being chosen as a finalist for the “2005 National Superintendent of the Year.” In addition to his role with GCPS, Wilbanks leadership has extended to the community. In addition to being engaged in multiple local civic organizations, Wilbanks has received honors from the Boy Scouts of America, the Gwinnett County Chamber of Commerce and Gwinnett Clean & Beautiful (GCPS website, n.d.). His nearly 16-year tenure as head of Gwinnett County Public Schools is uncommon for leaders of large school systems and has offered the district long-term stability of leadership. Under his stewardship, the district has developed a shared understanding of the mission and vision of the district, adopted a set of standardized

practices and garnered the necessary resources to support the burgeoning student population.

Anyone in such a prominent position of leadership is likely to have both supporters and critics. Wilbanks is no exception. He has drawn statements of unwavering support and adulation, as well as complaints about his dictatorial style of leadership. The criticism primarily tends to come from external stakeholders rather than GCPS faculty and staff, who generally appear to hold the leader in high regard. In a statement to the media, a former principal, now area superintendent declared, “He is my hero... There is a reason he’s the longest-serving urban superintendent in the country — it’s hard work”. (Gwinnett school chief, AJC, October 24, 2010). A more recent article focused on his 50-year career in education and specifically his nearly 20 years of leadership in Gwinnett County Public Schools. The article touted the superintendent’s vision, ability to make key hires, and talent for unifying the members of the school board in support of his agenda as some of his most effective attributes (Farner, 2014). Former GCPS assistant superintendent, Brooks Coleman, reflected on the leader’s commitment to the work.

He’s a pioneer in the profession, he’s worked hard and given his lifetime to make Gwinnett one of the finest school systems in the state and nation... Age doesn’t make a difference; the fact that he has the energy and enthusiasm, there are probably 25-year-olds who couldn’t touch him (Farner, 2014).

Throughout all the interviews that I conducted as a part of this case study, not once was there a direct criticism of the Superintendent from among the district leaders, Teach Gwinnett staff, principals or teachers. As reflected in articles written about his leadership, the lack of criticism could stem from the appreciation for this leader’s long-

term commitment to the school district and a belief that the success enjoyed by the district is, in large part, a result of his vision and hard work. Yet, there is no way to know for sure whether the lack of criticism is a function of extraordinarily effective leadership; concern about critiquing the lauded leader to a researcher employed by the district; or whether efforts to standardize policy and practice have led to a standardization of thinking, as well<sup>16</sup>.

In a local news story about the leader, former Gwinnett County employee, Susan Dietz stated, “He is low-key, but is one powerful man and you better not cross him...I was not afraid of him, but there are so many teachers that are. I think we have seen enough in Gwinnett County that they have good reason” (Donsky, October 24, 2010). The article went on to note that there was some public perception that the leader and his board would often make decisions without engaging the broader community. When the district won the coveted Broad Prize for Urban Education, Maureen Downey, a columnist for the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, titled her blogpost “Gwinnett wins prestigious Broad Prize for Urban Education: A validation of its strong superintendent,” but went on to note in the first paragraph of her posting that this recognition seemed to validate the “controversial superintendent” (Downey, October 19, 2010). In the previous year, Downey also alluded to the mixed reviews regarding Wilbanks. She characterized him as both “visionary” and “autocratic,” and reported that the school system “once sent school resource officers to the house of an AJC reporter” who was writing about the district (Downey, September 16, 2009). Comments posted in response to articles written about the leader include both high praise and stinging criticisms.

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<sup>16</sup> As noted in the chapter on methodology, I assured those interviewed for this case study that their responses would remain confidential. It is possible, however, that my employment with the district affected this finding.

Regardless of how he is perceived, there is little doubt that the stability of leadership has benefitted the district in many ways. For instance, the district has not experienced the noteworthy reorganization or redirection of priorities that often accompany the installation of new leadership. The senior staff and board members have a deep knowledge of the community and shared understanding of the vision and district priorities. Perhaps one of the most influential outcomes of the district's stable leadership has been the cultivation of the role of leaders across the district.

### ***Organizational Capacity – Fiscal Resources***

In addition to focusing on the development of strong leaders, GCPS has garnered the fiscal resources to manage the growth of the district and to deliver an effective instructional program. In the most recent fact sheet, the district reports that the overall operating budget for the district will exceed \$1.8 billion, resulting in a per student cost of \$7,804. In addition to securing the resources required to support its mission, the district also has a track record of successful fiscal management. The district reports that GCPS “is one of only two large districts in the nation to hold a triple-A bond rating” (GCPS, n.d., b, p.2).

Since 2007, the district has profited from a special purpose local option sales tax for education (SPLOST). The revenue from this tax will provide the district with more than \$870 million for the 2014-15 school year. Although SPLOST funds are not directly used to support Teach Gwinnett, careful financial planning has allowed the district to increase the organization's capacity to deliver an effective alternative teacher preparation program. The district's financial stability has also allowed the acquisition of resources

needed to deliver an exceptional academic program, including the construction of new schools to serve the growing population.

### **Effective Leadership**

In addition to organizational capacity, districts that exhibit effective implementation of reform efforts utilize effective leadership to support the development of a shared mission, vision, and values; offer clear expectations through standardization of practices and create measures aligned to desired outcomes; and provided essential human and fiscal resources. Although GCPS is one of the largest districts in the country, the standardization and depth of the culture are striking. The district is galvanized around a set of core beliefs and standards of practice that leaders and followers, alike, regarding their everyday tasks.

### ***Focused Strategy and Clear Goals***

Gwinnett County Public Schools has developed a clear and focused vision and mission that supports the alignment of policy and practice throughout the district. As noted in earlier chapters (see Chapter 6, Figure IV), the district has a well-developed vision focused on ensuring that students are able to obtain the knowledge and skills needed to be prepared for postsecondary education or to join the workforce. In addition, the district's mission clearly articulates the need for students to exhibit achievements that reflect "academic knowledge, skills and behavior" that demonstrate "measured improvement against local, national, and world-class standards" (Gwinnett County Public Schools, n.d., b.). The mission and vision are supported by a set of strategic priorities that offer a specific focus for all faculty and staff. These clear goals and expectations are

characteristics of districts with effective leadership who have worked to offer clear direction and focus for the work of the district.

One of the district's strategic priorities is to "recruit, employ, develop, and retain a workforce that achieves the mission and goals of the organization" (Gwinnett County Public Schools, n.d.). To achieve this priority, the district has placed sustained focus on the development of strong school level leaders prepared to support the district's clearly developed mission, vision and strategic goals. GCPS offers a district-based leadership development program, the *Quality-Plus Leader Academy (QPLA)* to help the district meet this challenge.

The nationally-recognized program has earned a reputation for being an exemplary training ground for aspiring school leaders and has received substantial funding from the Bush Institute (Bush Institute, 2011). Almost all school-based leaders complete QPLA. The only GCPS leaders who have not completed QPLA were in place long before the development of the program or completed leadership training and served as school leaders in other districts before coming to GCPS (although selection of external candidates is quite rare). The drive for excellence appears again in the naming of this program. The use of the term "quality-plus" was deliberate as explained by the Superintendent Wilbanks on the district's website:

Through the program, aspiring principals become students again in a customized leadership development program designed to ensure the district has the caliber of principals needed for the future. Note from the academy's title that we are not seeking "quality" leaders, but "quality-plus" leaders. Quality-Plus Leaders have certain characteristics. They are energetic in pursuing the organization's mission

and goals, and they can energize others to do the same. They are results-oriented, and view accountability as a value... Schools must have a Quality-Plus Leader if they are to be effective with today's changing conditions and rising expectations. To ensure we have such leaders in every Gwinnett school, we are committed to devoting the time, resources, and attention necessary to develop Quality-Plus Leaders among our employees. After all, everything rises and falls on leadership (Message from the Superintendent, n.d.).

Not only is there a focus on ensuring that district staff understand the value of leaders, there is also a concerted effort to be sure that all members of the community understand the value of excellent teachers. Posted on the wall just outside the offices of the director of Teach Gwinnett and her staff is another of the district's often repeated mantras. "There are two kinds of employees in the district – those who teach and those who support those who teach." Teachers in Gwinnett County are simultaneously put on a pedestal and held to high expectations. High expectations are paired with standardized practices to ensure that all educators attend to *The Gwinnett Way*. These expectations reflect a determination to emphasize the value of capacity provided through the district's human resources. In GCPS, effective district leadership ensures that these values are paired with deep-rooted belief in excellence and standardized practices that are designed to result in desired outcomes.

### ***Deep-Rooted Belief in Excellence***

Gwinnett County Public Schools has not only built an excellent school system, but has also created a brand. The expectation put forward on a daily basis by the faculty and staff is that the district operates a *system of world-class schools*. The idea of being

world-class is instilled throughout the language of the district. The district's strategic plan makes it clear that excellence is the expectation with the focal statement: "We believe that pursuing these attributes will move us closer to our vision of being a system of world-class schools" (Strategic Priorities, 2010). Early in my tenure with GCPS, my supervisor pointed out that the statement was carefully crafted – "a system of world-class schools" rather than a "world-class school system" in order to emphasize that each and every school is expected to deliver results. As such, district employees take the symbol of the torch and the belief in a "system of world-class schools" seriously.

Although the state has created report cards for all districts and school in Georgia, GCPS has established its own way of measuring success. Developed internally, the Results-Based Evaluation System (RBES) is used to rate each school's performance against a pre-determined set of standards measuring both academic and operational objectives. The Office of Research and Evaluation<sup>17</sup> produces the RBES report for each school that measures performance against a set of pre-determined criteria using school-specific performance expectations. The results of the RBES are intended to drive performance and promote continuous improvement among faculty and staff. Leaders are evaluated according to how their schools perform on the RBES. Those with impressive results receive accolades and additional funding to continue to promote their success. Any leader whose school is not meeting expectations is issued a stern warning from the superintendent and provided with intense intervention, including increased supervision from area superintendents who work with the school leader to develop plans for improvement. Plans are tailored to the needs of the school, but may include changes to human capital strategy, resource allocation or use of data to drive instruction.

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<sup>17</sup> This is the office in which I was an employee.



### ***Standardization of Practice***

Standardization within a district the size of Gwinnett County does not happen without vision and leadership. In addition to, and likely as a result of, effective and stable leadership, GCPS has worked to cultivate a coherence of practice across its system of schools. Not only are there clear expectations about how things are done, there is significant effort to firmly establish shared values and beliefs.

In the mid-1990s, GCPS developed a standardized curriculum, the Academic Knowledge and Skills. The AKS are aligned with the state curriculum, but are intended to be more rigorous. The district describes the standards for key stakeholders.

[T]he AKS are the standards for academic excellence for all students in Gwinnett County Public Schools...Since its inception in 1996, GCPS' AKS curriculum has reflected the collective wisdom of thousands of educators and community members who worked together to determine what students need to know and be able to do in order to be successful at the next grade level and in the future. This investment by GCPS' stakeholders has ensured that the AKS curriculum remains a rigorous and relevant blueprint for student learning in Gwinnett (Gwinnett County Public Schools, n.d., a).

In a 2010 article that appeared in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, a teacher credited the superintendent's work to standardize practice.

We used to get fads of the month from the central office telling us what worked in Texas," said teacher Tim Mullen, of Bay Creek Middle School. "When Mr. Wilbanks became superintendent, he developed the [Academic Knowledge and

Skills curriculum] so we were all teaching the same thing. He brought stability to the classroom (Donsky, October 24, 2010).

In addition to a standardized student curriculum, the district developed and implemented a standardized set of instructional strategies that teachers are expected to employ. The set of 13 research-based strategies, Quality-Plus Teaching Strategies, were grounded in research, but customized by the district based on input from GCPS teachers. Teachers throughout the district refer to the strategies and many keep them posted in their classrooms. Teach Gwinnett uses these standards as a cornerstone of their preparation curriculum and several school leaders noted the value of having Teach Gwinnett for introducing teachers to the Quality-Plus Teaching Strategies (Candidate Handbook, 2010-11, pp. 29-30).

### **The Intersection of District Culture and Teach Gwinnett**

Organizational capacity and effective leadership reflect a shared understanding of the mission, vision and values of the district. In addition, the standardization of curriculum, training and expectations created a focus that attempted to influence the efficacy and effectiveness of educators in the district. As a part of that work, GCPS developed a district-based teacher preparation program aimed at ensuring that teachers were specifically trained to understand and reflect the culture of the district. However, rather than using the program to recruit and assimilate new educators, Teach Gwinnett quickly developed into one of the district's strategies for reducing the number of non-highly qualified teachers,. However, district leaders continued to believe that the program offered an opportunity to enhance the district's focus on developing effective

educators. When asked why Gwinnett might want to grow their own teachers, one leader responded by saying,

If I think about what it means to be a Gwinnett educator, in my opinion, it's someone...who's willing to go the extra mile, who understands that this district provides a lot of support, both fiscal support, material supplies, training, you name it, human support, human resources support, and will utilize that to the best of their ability. I think that a Gwinnett teacher understands that excellence is the expectation, and it's funny because I've worked in other districts who say that. Of course, everybody says failure is not an option. Every child can learn. We've heard all of this. But I think in Gwinnett, we go about it in a different way. We don't beat you into believing that failure is not an option. If I knock it over your head enough times, you will believe it. Instead, we say as a professional, you understand what it means to be an educator, and given that understanding, we expect you to meet it. It's almost as if we get into your own gut and make you believe that you can be phenomenal and then you're going to surpass those expectations...So, our people are expected to meet the needs of all of those individuals. I don't know that I can say it any better than that. It's just expectations (GCPS – SL3).

This quote reflects district leaders' beliefs that completing a preparation program oriented to the high standards espoused by the district would be beneficial even if candidates had been working in the district prior to enrollment. Teach Gwinnett could serve as a way to further solidify a candidate's familiarization and understanding of *The Gwinnett Way*.

### *Existing Supply of Candidates*

By 2008, the implementation of the federal policy requiring all core content teachers to be highly qualified was in full swing. Schools, districts and states were reporting the percentages of teachers working in their schools who were out of compliance with the new law. These requirements increased pressure in Gwinnett County – where the school system was already struggling to meet the demand for new teachers. Further still, having to replace non-certified educators already employed by the school system would only expand the challenge. Many of those teachers not considered highly qualified met minimum requirements for enrolling in a GaTAPP program.

GCPS leaders reported that initial planning for Teach Gwinnett had included a focus on recruiting new talent to the school system. Economic instability had created a potential pool of talent that leaders felt could be recruited from other industries into GCPS classrooms, especially in some of the most hard-to-staff areas like science and math. However, personnel records revealed that most of the candidates who enrolled in Teach Gwinnett were not proactively recruited for the program by district staff. Of the 278 Teach Gwinnett participants, more than 90% had worked as teachers in Gwinnett County prior to the point at which they enrolled in Teach Gwinnett. Although leaders had initially anticipated recruiting candidates specifically for the program, demand for new teachers began to diminish and the district identified a group of teachers already working in the district, who lacked certification and, therefore, were not highly qualified. From the perspective of district leaders responsible for overseeing the staffing of all schools, retention of an effective teacher is preferable to recruiting a new one. If for no other reason, the leader expressed his concerns about the costs associated with recruiting

and hiring a new teacher. His focus reflects the district's attention to maintaining its healthy financial standing and described the significant costs associated with recruiting and hiring a teacher. He also noted how many resources the district invests in new teachers and expressed concern about lost investments when early career teachers leave the district (GCPS-SL2). The same leader went on to note the challenge of ensuring that all teachers were highly qualified and how Teach Gwinnett played a role in reducing the numbers of teachers already working in the district who were not highly qualified:

I think the biggest impact on Teach Gwinnett, as a result of the economy, has been [that] their focus has shifted from brand new folk[s], coming in from outside the organization that we're hiring because of nationwide and local shortages, to looking at all the folk[s] that were here that were not professionally certified, and those numbered around 600... So now, we either need to get these folk[s] fully credentialed and assess their performance, or we need to move them on out and hire other highly qualified, highly effective teachers. (GCPS-SL2)

Even though the demand to ensure that educators were highly qualified put pressure on districts to be sure that teachers held the appropriate credentials, there was also pressure to find educators who could have a positive impact on student learning. Leaders noted the central role of district-based teacher preparation in this quest. District leaders saw Teach Gwinnett as an opportunity to be proactive in assuring that the district has a well-prepared and highly qualified workforce. One senior leader explicitly noted the district's role in developing the human capital pipeline:

Well, I think it is essential for a district to have its own teacher prep program for certification... and the reason I say that is because you cannot, as a business, as an

organization, wait for somebody else to prepare a succession plan or to prepare a pool of highly effective people. You cannot wait for an external force to bring you the talent. Even though Gwinnett is nestled comfortably around so many colleges and universities, even though we are connected via technology to colleges and universities...our stakeholders are holding us responsible for making sure that we have a qualified workforce...[H]aving been here for almost twenty years, when you look at the workforce that's currently in Gwinnett County... a large workforce of 22,800 people, then it bears to reason why you're not cultivating your own, why you're not working in the ground in your own backyard. (GCPS-SL1)

Although the district leaders felt responsibility for creating the opportunity for educators to enter the district through an alternative pathway, they placed over the selection of Teach Gwinnett candidates in the hands of school leaders.

### ***Candidate Selection***

The primary goals of stakeholders ultimately responsible for implementation are likely to have a significant impact on the implementation of policies and programs. In Gwinnett County Public Schools, district leaders gave school leaders the authority to hire teachers. The expectation associated with that autonomy was that school leaders would select teachers most likely to support student learning and school performance. Until the introduction of NCLB, a school leader could choose teachers most likely to support that expectation, regardless of certification status. Like many other districts this meant that GCPS employed some educators who did not hold full, valid licenses.<sup>18</sup> However, with the implementation of highly qualified requirements, the state began to place more

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<sup>18</sup> These teachers generally applied for permits allowing them to work without a credential.

restrictions on this practice. Specifically, the state reduced the amount of time a teacher could work without holding the required credential. The district was faced with what could be conflicting priorities: continuing to employ teachers without credentials who school leaders considered effective and meeting the expectation of having a staff of highly qualified teachers. Teach Gwinnett offered a potential solution.

Although the state guidelines make it clear that an individual must be employed as a teacher in order to enroll in a GaTAPP program, those guidelines do not prohibit programs from recruiting external candidates and supporting their placement in schools. District-level staff working with the Teach Gwinnett program could have taken on the task of recruiting and screening potential Teach Gwinnett candidates and then trying to support the placement of selected candidates. In fact, during planning stages, that strategy was supported by district leaders tasked with developing the program. Ultimately, however, Gwinnett County did not take that approach. The district engaged in very little recruitment specifically designed to recruit new teachers, who would quickly be assimilated to the district culture through Teach Gwinnett. Because of the overall demand for teachers, the Office of Human Resources engaged in significant, but usually generic, recruiting efforts. In fact, district leaders working with Teach Gwinnett cited only one external recruitment activity focused on recruiting math and science major from nearby Kennesaw State University (GCPS-SL2). The lack of targeted recruitment strategies designed specifically for the Teach Gwinnett suggests that districts leaders may have adjusted the goals of the program from attracting new teachers to ensuring that educators already working in the district were designated as highly qualified.

Technically, all prospective GCPS employees are expected to apply directly to the district through a centralized application system. Applicants meeting district requirements (e.g., holding appropriate credentials) could then be reviewed by school leaders, who are authorized to make final hiring decisions. In reality, as explained by district leaders and confirmed through teacher interviews, more often prospective educators applied directly to school leaders (GCPS-TGM). If a principal was interested in a candidate, that leader would ask the individual to make an application through the centralized system. After the applicant had been approved for hire, the school leader could then make a formal offer of employment. Many Teach Gwinnett participants described scenarios consistent with that description when asked how they first became employed in the district. Two strategies were most often cited. In some cases, educators reported learning about a position by word-of-mouth. Generally, that information led the candidate to apply directly to the school leader. The other most frequent response indicated that a school leader encouraged the individual, often working as a paraprofessional, to apply for a teaching position. Ironically, none of Teach Gwinnett candidates interviewed for this project referenced a district recruiting fair or other district-wide recruitment strategy as the means through which they came to be employed in the district.<sup>19</sup> This suggests that Teach Gwinnett candidates were primarily selected by school level leaders rather than program staff. On one hand, the lack of recruiting efforts focused on bringing new teachers to the district could reflect the district's trust in the development of strong school leaders, who were, therefore, equipped to make effective staffing decisions. On the other hand, the district may have also recognized the

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<sup>19</sup> Although I cannot know, I suspect that because the teachers interviewed were all Teach Gwinnett candidates, their recruitment experience might be expected to be somewhat different than coming to the district in other ways.



diminished demand for new educators and allowed school leaders to focus on ensuring that all educators working in their schools were highly qualified. Regardless, this choice demonstrates the district's effort to empower leaders who were developed to support its mission, vision and goals.

Program staff reported having little, if any, opportunity to implement selection criteria for the program and indicated that selection, beyond state-mandated minimum requirements, was essentially first-come, first-served (GCPS-TG3). The selection strategy, based almost entirely on leader recommendation, does not appear to have been deliberate or necessarily anticipated by district leaders at the start of the program. Instead, once program staff realized that leaders were recommending candidates who were already working for the district, they began to market the program to other employed teachers who needed to earn certification (GCPS-TG3).

When asked how they learned about Teach Gwinnett, three responses were most often indicated by candidates: word-of-mouth from another educator, marketing emails from Teach Gwinnett, and administrator recommendation. As noted earlier, regardless of how educators learned about the program, candidates were required to secure a recommendation from the school leader in order to be accepted and enrolled in Teach Gwinnett. The Teach Gwinnett staff reported that this sometimes created a challenge if a school leader recommended a candidate who the staff felt was not prepared to successfully complete Teach Gwinnett. Specific examples included athletic coaches and tenured teachers who lacked a full teaching license. Each year, the program had space for 90-100 candidates. When these slots were taken, other potential applicants had to be turned away (GCPS-TG3). This suggests that there may not have been strong

understanding between Teach Gwinnett staff and school leaders regarding the program goals and priorities. While Teach Gwinnett staff seemed to focus on identifying educators with the potential to have a positive impact on increased student learning, at least some school leaders appeared to have been more focused on ensuring that their teachers were all highly qualified. School leaders were surveyed about their perspectives on Teach Gwinnett. The data does not offer definitive evidence regarding the primary motivations of principals who recommended candidates for the program. Regardless, this tension reflects a lack of coherence regarding the district's approach to staffing schools with effective educators and, perhaps, a weakness in the district's efforts to develop a shared understanding of how to achieve district goals.

Beyond recommending candidates for the programs, school leaders were also tasked with identifying the required school-based mentor. Supervisors and candidates reported that this match was not always ideal, and raised concerns about the mentor selection processes (GCPS-TGM). This finding is somewhat surprising in an organization that seems to value standardized practices. The district clearly devoted substantial resources to ensure that all district employees understand the shared mission and vision, that all leaders have consistent training, and that all teachers are focused on the same set of instructional strategies. The lack of strategic focus on selecting mentors who could ensure that Teach Gwinnett candidates were fully entrenched in *The Gwinnett Way* appears to have been a missed opportunity. If the district viewed Teach Gwinnett as a way to support the enculturation of Teach Gwinnett candidates, mentor teachers could have played a significant role in this effort. Instead, candidates reported that mentors often appeared to be selected out of convenience and were not always prepared or willing

to support their development. In fact, some candidates reported that mentors and colleagues expressed frustration that Teach Gwinnett candidates were not required to complete traditional educator preparation programs. Although its initial plan tied the mission and vision of the district to the development of Teach Gwinnett, it appears that there may have been some lack of clarity and difference of opinion about the purpose and value of the program.

### ***School Leader Perceptions of Teach Gwinnett***

After three years of program implementation, 83% of school leaders who responded to a survey about Teach Gwinnett indicated that they understood the purpose of the program. When asked whether they would hire a teacher who had recently graduated from a traditional preparation program or Teach Gwinnett, school leaders largely indicated that they would prefer someone who was already certified, had experience working with students (e.g., student teaching), and would require less of their time and support. However, when asked about hiring an individual planning to enroll in Teach Gwinnett or a person planning to enroll in a different alternative preparation program, school leaders overwhelmingly indicated their preference for Teach Gwinnett, citing that the program would provide an opportunity to ensure that teachers would learn how to do things the way that they are done in Gwinnett County.

While 52% of respondents indicated that they had hired an educator who had subsequently enrolled in Teach Gwinnett, 40% also responded that they did not know a lot about the details of the program. More than 80% of school leaders indicated that they felt that, “Teach Gwinnett offers the district a way to ensure that new teachers learn about how we do things in GCPS (e.g., using Quality-Plus Teaching Strategies)” and a 61.4%

of respondents designated that they would be somewhat or very likely to recommend Teach Gwinnett program to potential candidates. In contrast, only 25% felt that the program would be a good tool for recruiting great candidates, and just 38% viewed Teach Gwinnett as a tool for retaining teachers. These results suggest that school leaders felt strongly about the program's ability to assimilate teachers to *The Gwinnett Way* and would recommend the program to potential candidates. However, in contrast with to evidence collected through interviews with district leaders and Teach Gwinnett staff, 40% of principals indicated that they were not sure that Teach Gwinnett was the best option for non-certified teachers (see Table IV). It is important to note that only 60% of school leaders responded to the survey, and among those respondents, only 38.1% of respondent reported having recommended a candidate for Teach Gwinnett. Although the district may have done a good job providing a clear mission and vision for the district, it appears that there was less coherence about the mission and vision for the Teach Gwinnett program.

**Table IV. School Leader Perception of the Usefulness of Teach Gwinnett**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Teach Gwinnett offers the district a way to ensure that new teachers learn about how we do things in GCPS (e.g, using Quality-Plus Teaching Strategies).	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	16.7% (12)	58.3% (42)	25.0% (18)
Teach Gwinnett is the best option for non-certified teachers who need to earn their certification.	0.0% (0)	8.3% (6)	40.3% (29)	29.2% (21)	22.2% (16)
I use Teach Gwinnett as a tool for recruiting great teachers. (e.g., I tell prospective teachers who need certification about Teach Gwinnett.)	5.6% (4)	13.9% (10)	55.6% (40)	20.8% (15)	4.2% (3)
I use Teach Gwinnett as a tool for retaining great teachers. (e.g., I recommend Teach Gwinnett to teachers who need to earn their certification.)	4.2% (3)	9.9% (7)	47.9% (34)	29.6% (21)	8.5% (6)

When asked to rate the average performance of Teach Gwinnett teachers in regard to the Quality-Plus Teaching Strategies, 95% of administrators overwhelmingly agreed that Teach Gwinnett candidates met or exceeded expectations in their ability to “utilize Quality-Plus Teaching Strategies.” The survey also asked leaders about performance regarding seven other factors related to the work of teaching. In general, most respondents indicated that Teach Gwinnett teachers either met or exceeded expectations. Only two factors stood out for having more than 5% of respondents rating these teachers as falling below expectations: “utilizing differentiated instruction” and “utilizing data to inform instruction.” These results suggest that, in general, school leaders perceive that Teach Gwinnett teachers consistently meet or exceed expectations, and strongly believe that these educators use the instructional strategies espoused by the district. If, as

suggested by district leaders, the program was designed to support the development educators who exhibited the skills and behaviors reflected in the standardized approach to instruction and further enhance *The Gwinnett Way*, it appears the program may have met expectations. However, this purpose is less clear if the educators appeared to have been working in the district prior to enrollment in the program.

By implementing their own district-based teacher preparation program, Gwinnett County Public Schools took advantage of the state's efforts to capitalize on the built-in flexibilities of the highly qualified requirements of No Child Left Behind. Essentially, by enrolling a teacher in Teach Gwinnett, the district could deem as highly qualified any individual they selected as long as that person met the minimum requirements set out in federal and state policy. Yet, the program also reflected the district's strong internal culture. Leaders were empowered to act as street-level bureaucrats as they decided who to recommend for Teach Gwinnett. Because candidates had to have a baccalaureate degree and pass state-mandated assessment, enrollment in Teach Gwinnett automatically ensured that candidates could be considered highly qualified. Perhaps even more important to district leaders was the fact that the program was specifically designed to support candidates' investment in The Gwinnett Way. Even if an educator had been working in the district, there were no guarantees that the candidate been familiarized with district goals and expectations. Although there were some missed opportunities, such as poor mentor matching and lack of clear communication about program goals with school leaders, Teach Gwinnett did provide candidates direct training based on the standardized instructional practices espoused by the district. Overall, this case study demonstrates that the presence of a strong district has significant influence over implementation, whether

that implementation is in the form of a policy, such as the highly qualified policy, or a program, like Teach Gwinnett.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Conclusion**

The federal role in education continues to expand, and federal policy is often designed to change behavior at state and local levels. Yet the path through which a policy is implemented is a long and winding road. Understanding the process of implementation and the factors that influence the implementation process has been a topic of research for more than half a century. Yet, there is still more to learn. As suggested by Honig (2006), there is a need to better understand the relationship between policy design, the individuals responsible for implementation and the context in which implementation takes place. This case study examines the implementation of the federal highly qualified policy through the lens of a district-based teacher preparation program. Although I examine how the design of the policy and street-level bureaucrats influence the implementation process, I pay particular attention to the role of district culture. Because of the decentralized nature of public education in the United States, the place of implementation is likely to have significant impact on the outcomes.

No Child Left Behind, the most recent reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, created new mechanisms for holding schools, districts and states accountable for the outcomes of their work. In addition to holding schools accountable for student outcomes, the policy also focused on the quality of our nation's teacher corps as a significant lever for the improvement our nation's education system. For years, researchers and critics have reported statistics about the lack of rigor in schools of education, the less than impressive qualifications of those choosing to pursue degrees in education and the inadequacy of the content knowledge teachers often possess in the



subject area in which they are endorsed to teach (Auguste, Kihn & Miller, 2010; Levine, 2006). In an attempt to shift how states, districts and schools identify individuals who are eligible to work as educators in our nation's schools, the law includes the federal government's first attempt to regulate teacher qualifications.

NCLB mandates that all educators working in a core content area be highly qualified. To meet this expectation a teacher must hold a bachelor's degree, have demonstrated content knowledge, and hold full state certification. These new federal requirements clearly signaled a demand for increased attention to the knowledge and skills, particularly content knowledge, but also required that educators achieve state certification. In this way, the new policy did not alienate proponents of teacher professionalism, who argue that teacher preparation programs have value, or those who champion *competitive certification* and suggest that reducing barriers to the profession could increase the quality of those willing to enter the field (Rotherham & Mead, 2004). More importantly, the highly qualified policy was designed to allow educators who earn certification through alternative teacher preparation programs to be considered highly qualified before having completed all program requirements. In this case study, I consider how policy design, individuals responsible for implementation and context, specifically district culture, influenced the implementation of the highly qualified policy.

### **Policy**

The highly qualified policy was designed to ensure that all students have access to teachers adequately prepared to deliver instruction order to improve student outcomes. Political leaders developed the policy to address a perceived need to increase the quality of the teacher corps, suggesting that the profession had not adequately self-regulated.

Changes such as this are more complicated and complex than what Honig calls *peripheral changes*, “such as new course schedules or classroom seating arrangements” (p.14-15). Rather, the inclusion of the highly qualified requirement was intended to bring about a *fundamental change* aimed at ensuring the competency of core academic teachers. Achieving this type of change through federal policy is affected by a myriad of factors, including the design of the policy.

Based on their research of the implementation of federal programs intended to change state and local practice, Berman and McLaughlin suggest that policies most likely to succeed are those that reflect mutual adaptation. Mutual adaptation requires that both the policy and the context in which the policy is implemented are amenable to some level of change (Berman and McLaughlin, 1975). In their analyses of this concept, the authors find that change is most successful when policies are flexible enough to allow those closest to the work to mold programs and policies to fit their needs while implementing the desired changes. The authors also stress that policies should be amenable to change.

In this case, the highly qualified policy incorporated significant flexibilities, but the policy itself remained unchanged and cannot be considered an example of mutual adaptation. Yet, perhaps policymakers have learned from past mistakes. By including substantial flexibility, the law allowed states to shape the implementation of the policy by taking into account the nature of state and local context. Although the flexibilities likely limited the intended impact of the policy, the allowance of educators enrolled in alternative preparation programs provided opportunity for states to continue to support a growing pathway to the classroom. In this case, Georgia was able to utilize its recently developed alternative pathway to certification, GaTAPP, as a way to identify educators as

highly qualified. Without this flexibility, many alternative preparation programs, including Teach Gwinnett, might never have been developed. And, those already in operation, likely would have struggled to maintain sufficient enrollment and might even have been forced to close. Although the law does not preference alternative routes to certification, documents and regulations developed by the U.S. Department of Education clearly offer significant support from the Bush administration. This political support influenced the interpretation of laws and implementation strategies.

While there is not clear evidence of mutual adaptation, the flexibilities built into the highly qualified policy allowed states to customize implementation. States were required to submit plans and provide reports on progress towards meeting the expectations of the highly qualified policy, but retained a great deal of authority over determining how teachers would be assessed against highly qualified requirements. Because of the flexibilities related to assessment of content knowledge and requirements for achieving certification, states did not necessarily have to introduce significant changes in requirements for individuals pursuing a career in teaching. Because of the pre-existing requirements for achieving certification in Georgia, there is little evidence that there was much adaptation of behavior regarding the issuance of certification. While the flexibility of highly qualified policy did not result in fundamental changes to the structure or requirements for educator certification in Georgia, the policy did support the growth of the state's alternative pathway to teaching.

Even though the state did not implement more rigorous requirements for earning a license to teach, Georgia did successfully implement reporting requirements and focused on efforts to ensure that all districts had plans for reducing the number of non-highly

qualified educators. Because the law did not establish requirements that were not already in existence in Georgia, it is likely that the reporting requirements, rather than the highly qualified criteria, affected changes in behavior. In this case, there is clear evidence that leaders in Gwinnett County Public Schools focused on developing strategies designed to address the numbers of non-highly qualified educators working in the district's schools.

In the years following initial implementation of the highly qualified policy, the district experienced significant demand for teachers. Searching for strategies to bring new teachers to the district, GCPS applied to develop a district-based program that could be approved through the state's alternative preparation pathway, GaTAPP. By the time that the district designed the program and received approval from the state, demand for new teachers had begun to decline. As the demand for more teachers diminished, the district became more focused on reducing the number of non-highly qualified teachers already working in the district. Eventually, the strategy for selecting teacher for the district-based alternative preparation program shifted from recruiting new teachers to retaining teachers by offering a pathway to certification, and highly-qualified status, for non-highly qualified teachers already working in GCPS schools. District leaders identified educators who lacked certification and encouraged them to enroll in Teach Gwinnett, which enabled them to be considered highly qualified. In this way, the implementation of the highly qualified policy influenced the district's execution of its district-based alternative preparation program. In addition to policy desing, those responsible for implementation also play an important role in the implementation process.

**People**

Weatherley and Lipsky (1977) describe actors closest to and responsible for implementation as street-level bureaucrats. These individuals have specialized knowledge of the craft and the local context that makes them particularly prepared to understand the strengths and limitations of the policy they have been asked to implement. Throughout the implementation of the highly qualified policy, state and local actors affected the process of implementation.

Prior to the implementation of the highly qualified policy, state-level officials in Georgia were already developing alternative pathways to teaching. Superintendents and leaders at the Georgia Professional Standards Commission were keenly aware of the growing demand for teachers across the state. Even after the initial implementation of the highly qualified policy, research showed that the state needed to increase production of teachers (Henson, 2008). As a result of this demand and the growth and expansion of alternative preparation programs across the country, a group of superintendents presented the state with a request to develop a new pathway to teaching that would be managed by a regional education service agency. Although these leaders might not meet Weatherley and Lipsky's definition of street-level bureaucrats, these individuals had significant influence on the development of the state's new alternate route to preparation. These leaders understood the value of a preparation program situated close to their districts that also offered candidates the opportunity to begin teaching while enrolled in the program.

Following the successful implementation of that first program run by the Northwest RESA, state leaders at the PSC developed a statewide model for alternative routes to preparation specifically designed to be situated outside of institutions of higher

education. The newly approved model, GaTAPP, had a few requirements for candidate enrollment, such as minimum grade point averages and passing scores on state-required assessments of content knowledge. To receive approval, programs had to demonstrate how candidates would be supported using a candidate support team, as well as how they would be trained to master a set of competencies based on the Danielson Framework. Beyond these key requirements, the model allowed approved GaTAPP programs to customize program components to meet the needs of the local district(s) being served.

In addition to creating GaTAPP, the leadership at the PSC was instrumental in the implementation of Georgia's highly qualified reporting strategy. The PSC supported the development of a tool districts and schools were required to use to report on the highly qualified status of all core academic teachers. The reporting requirements likely elevated districts' and schools' attention to the state's expectation for compliance with the new policy. As such, leaders at the PSC were not only involved in creating an alternative pathway for entering the teaching profession, but also supported the federal government's efforts to elevate attention regarding the qualifications of teachers.

Even though the interpretations of policy and the actions taken by these state-level leaders shaped the outcome of the implementation, street-level bureaucrats in Gwinnett County had significant influence over the implementation of the highly qualified policy at the local level. Located in one of fastest growing counties in the Southeast United States during the late 1990s, Gwinnett County Public Schools experienced significant demand to hire new teachers. As part of its strategy to hire teachers to fill its classrooms, the district requested permission to develop a plan to offer a district-based GaTAPP program. Ironically, as the district approached the first year of implementation of Teach Gwinnett,

the statewide economy stabilized and growth slowed. Consequently, the demand for teachers declined. With the crisis for new teachers being alleviated, the district began to focus on other challenges.

Although GCPS employed a smaller percentage of non-highly qualified teachers than many other districts in Georgia, the total number of non-highly teachers eclipsed that of many of the state's smaller districts. The district's new alternative preparation program, Teach Gwinnett, offered an opportunity to address the problem.

Two key groups of street-level bureaucrats influenced the implementation of the highly qualified policy through the execution of Teach Gwinnett. First, district leaders identified non-highly qualified educators and sent them information about the program to encourage enrollment. In addition, the district shifted selection of Teach Gwinnett candidates to local school leaders. By requiring Teach Gwinnett candidates to have a recommendation from a principal, the district allowed school level leaders to have significant influence over an educator's highly qualified status. There is clear evidence that this strategy worked. The vast majority of Teach Gwinnett candidates had been employed as non-highly qualified educators prior to enrollment. A senior leader responsible for staffing reported that as a result of Teach Gwinnett, the number of non-highly qualified teachers working in the district reduced dramatically. Although these street-level bureaucrats had a great deal of influence over the selection of candidates, the district also purported to use Teach Gwinnett to assimilate program participants to the district's culture, better known as *The Gwinnett Way*. Districts leaders overwhelmingly cited this as an important advantage of the Teach Gwinnett program.

**Places**

Research on implementation clearly identifies that context influences the process of implementation. In this case, as noted above, political and economic factors affected the implementation of the highly qualified policy in Gwinnett County. However, the culture of the district had the most influence on the implementation of the highly qualified policy in Gwinnett County. As previously reported, research that examines the influence of district culture during the process of implementation is limited. This case study serves as an additional source of information about the ways in which district culture influences implementation of the highly qualified policy.

***District Culture***

Many districts exhibit dysfunctional characteristics, such as ineffective leadership, lack of focused goals or clearly defined strategies for effective instruction, and inadequate attention to developing human capital, an effective management of financial resources. These characteristics make it difficult for many districts to effectively implement policies or programs that will lead to educational improvements (McAdams and Zinck, 1998). In their research on this topic, Corcoran and Lawrence (2003) identify specific traits associated with successful implementation of reform efforts, including effective leadership and organizational capacity. As evidenced in this case, Gwinnett County Public Schools demonstrates highly functioning leadership and significant organizational capacity that have resulted in an emphasis on human capital and fiscal resources, focus of attention on clear goals, and standardized behaviors and strategies designed to result in desired outcomes.



These characteristics supported Gwinnett County's ability to implement the highly qualified policy, in part through the execution of a district-based teacher preparation program. Teach Gwinnett provided the district with an opportunity to meet the challenge of reducing the number of non-highly qualified teachers, while continuing to enhance the culture of the district. However, it is unclear whether this strategy actually resulted in producing more effective educators or whether the district simply found a way to comply with the policy as it continued to enhance its own practices.

Although the district appeared to have a highly functional approach to leadership that resulted in high expectations and clear goals, there was little evidence that the empowerment of school leaders would lead to the selection of candidates more likely to become effective educators than candidates that might have been selected through alternative strategies. However, by empowering school leaders to recommend candidates for the program, the district wagered that these leaders, street-level bureaucrats, would select educators best suited to provide effective instruction. Although the district purports to have a laser-like focus on high expectations that should have focused school leaders' attention on selecting candidates with high potential for delivering effective instruction, there was some concern that school level leaders may have recommended candidates that did not reflect this commitment. The lack of confidence expressed by the Teach Gwinnett staff regarding principal selection of candidates suggests that the district still has opportunity to improve. Perhaps the district could work to more clearly articulate goals and the strategies for achieving desired outcomes and how that is connected to strategies used to select candidates for Teach Gwinnett. Regardless, it seems likely that

district leaders will continue to choose to invest in Teach Gwinnett, as it is designed to enhance the district culture.

Thus far, the district's culture, including focused goals, standardized practices and attention to developing effective leaders, has resulted in evidence of high student achievement and reduction of achievement gaps between minority and white students. Analysis of interviews and documents reveal a pervasive, deep-rooted and shared belief in excellence among district stakeholders. Teachers and district leaders consistently reported that teachers working in Gwinnett County met a standard of excellence that exceeded the standards of practice in other Georgia districts. District leaders believed that having their own district-based teacher preparation program allowed them to train teachers based on strategies and values of the district. Most importantly, leaders acknowledged that Teach Gwinnett could help candidates learn *The Gwinnett Way* more quickly than teachers who might come to the district through other preparation programs. Yet the selection of teachers for the program was primarily driven by the need to ensure that all teachers currently working in GCPS met the highly qualified requirements. District leaders may have underestimated the impact that the expectation that schools reduce the number of non-highly qualified teachers would have on candidate selection. Although leaders' responses suggest that they would prefer to hire certified candidates, who would presumably be highly-qualified, the Teach Gwinnett program did not promote that strategy. Instead, the program may have simply offered leaders a quick fix in a challenging situation.

The district's clear alignment of the program to the district mission and vision, coupled with training focused on district-specific student standards and the Quality-Plus

Teaching Strategies, created a preparation program designed to ensure that completers would be fully prepared to implement instruction that reflects district expectations and desired outcomes. The program's focus on assimilating candidates to *The Gwinnett Way* may have obscured the need for candidates to have more training related to specific pedagogical strategies. In at least a few cases, leaders reported that Teach Gwinnett teachers fell below expectations on key instructional strategies, such as providing differentiated instruction and the use of data to drive instruction. As noted several times, Teach Gwinnett did not employ a rigorous selection strategy, but relied primarily on school leaders' recommendations. Perhaps selection based on observation of teaching practice or interviews designed to simulate real-world experiences could have led to even better candidates than those who completed Teach Gwinnett. A structured selection strategy could also have helped the district identify the type of preparation and training that was most needed by candidates.

These findings suggest that efforts to improve educational outcomes must continue to take into account how policy, people and places influence implementation. In particular, though, this case study highlights the fact that leaders of highly functional districts with strong internal cultures are likely to find ways to meet the expectations of policy, while continuing to manage their practices and behaviors in ways they feel are most suited to their desired outcomes. Although Gwinnett County Public Schools exhibits many of the characteristics identified as important for successful implementation of reform efforts, there is little evidence to suggest that the highly qualified policy had much of an impact on who was allowed to teach. The compromises embedded in the

policy enabled Gwinnett County leaders to meet their needs while simultaneously meeting the letter of the law.

Implementation of education policy will always be affected by its design, be influenced directly by individuals responsible for implementation and affected by context, such as the local economy or political climate. Yet there is a need to continue to examine how district culture, whether highly functional or highly dysfunctional, plays a role in implementation that will lead to achieving desired outcomes. Perhaps federal policymakers should reconsider their approach to supporting increased access to highly qualified teachers. With increased national attention on measuring the quality of educator preparation programs, development of robust teacher evaluation systems that support the identification of effective teaching based on outcomes rather than inputs, the development of differentiated compensation models and increased roles for teachers to serve as leaders, there are multiple avenues for influencing the quality of our nation's teachers. As these strategies are developed, at the local, state, and national level, implementation will be a key factor in the success or failure of these strategies to enhance teacher quality and increase student achievement.

## Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Highly Qualified Policy Language

(23) HIGHLY QUALIFIED- The term highly qualified' —

(A) when used with respect to any public elementary school or secondary school teacher teaching in a State, means that —

- (i) the teacher has obtained full State certification as a teacher (including certification obtained through alternative routes to certification) or passed the State teacher licensing examination, and holds a license to teach in such State, except that when used with respect to any teacher teaching in a public charter school, the term means that the teacher meets the requirements set forth in the State's public charter school law; and
- (ii) the teacher has not had certification or licensure requirements waived on an emergency, temporary, or provisional basis;

(B) when used with respect to —

- (i) an elementary school teacher who is new to the profession, means that the teacher —
  - (I) holds at least a bachelor's degree; and
  - (II) has demonstrated, by passing a rigorous State test, subject knowledge and teaching skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and other areas of the basic elementary school curriculum (which may consist of passing a State-required certification or licensing test or tests in reading, writing, mathematics, and other areas of the basic elementary school curriculum);
 or
- (ii) a middle or secondary school teacher who is new to the profession, means that the teacher holds at least a bachelor's degree and has demonstrated a high level of competency in each of the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches by —

- (I) passing a rigorous State academic subject test in each of the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches (which may consist of a passing level of performance on a State-required certification or licensing test or tests in each of the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches); or
- (II) successful completion, in each of the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches, of an academic major, a graduate degree, coursework equivalent to an undergraduate academic major, or advanced certification or credentialing; and

(C) when used with respect to an elementary, middle, or secondary school teacher who is not new to the profession, means that the teacher holds at least a bachelor's degree and —

- (i) has met the applicable standard in clause (i) or (ii) of subparagraph (B), which includes an option for a test; or
- (ii) demonstrates competence in all the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches based on a high objective uniform State standard of evaluation that —

- (I) is set by the State for both grade appropriate academic subject matter knowledge and teaching skills;
- (II) is aligned with challenging State academic content and student academic achievement standards and developed in consultation with core content specialists, teachers, principals, and school administrators;
- (III) provides objective, coherent information about the teacher's attainment of core content knowledge in the academic subjects in which a teacher teaches;
- (IV) is applied uniformly to all teachers in the same academic subject and the same grade level throughout the State;
- (V) takes into consideration, but not be based primarily on, the time the teacher has been teaching in the academic subject;
- (VI) is made available to the public upon request; and
- (VII) may involve multiple, objective measures of teacher competency.

## Appendix 1I – Interview Protocols

### TEACH GWINNETT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL Participant

The primary purpose of this interview is to learn more about the Teach Gwinnett program, evaluate its strengths and weaknesses, understand how it fits into the GCPS Strategic Vision and how that vision for the program is aligned across stakeholders. One primary aspect of that is to learn about the experience candidates have in the program. Further, as a TG candidate, you are an important resource for recognizing components of the program that are particularly strong or valuable, but also you help us identify those aspects of the program that are in need of improvement or are unnecessary.

#### Research questions:

1. How does Teach Gwinnett meet the needs of the district, the school, the candidate?
  2. How does Teach Gwinnett support the district's Strategic Priorities?
  3. Is Teach Gwinnett a successful program?
- 

#### Background and Educational Philosophy

To help me understand your perspective on Teach Gwinnett, we would like to get a better sense of your background and educational philosophy:

1. Could you share a little about your educational background?
  - a. Post-secondary experience
2. Tell me about your first position in GCPS?
  - a. (If first position was not teaching)How long were you in that role?
  - b. How did you learn about the teaching job?
  - c. How long have you been teaching in Gwinnett County?
  - d. Have you worked in more than one school in GCPS? If so, in what schools have you worked and for how long in each school?
  - e. Have you had any teaching experiences outside of Gwinnett County?
  - f. If you think back to the interview process, can you describe the types of questions the principal asked of you? (qualities, experiences and/or skills)
3. Do you currently have an advanced degree – like a master’s degree?
  - a. If yes, in what?
  - b. Do you think that is something you intend to pursue? If so, why?
4. Why did you decide to become a teacher?
  - a. Do you think you will remain in education?
  - b. If yes, do you hope to remain in the classroom or do you have other plans?
  - c. What is it about teaching that will keep you in the classroom rather than moving into district administration? (or vice versa?)
5. How would you describe what it means to be an effective teacher?

#### Position



1. How did you learn about the Teach Gwinnett program?
  - a. What were the steps in your application process?
  - b. Did you have to get formal recommendations for the program?
    - i. If so, who recommended you for the program?
2. In a minute, we'll discuss training that you have received as a part of Teach Gwinnett. For now, please describe any other training or professional development (external to school-based professional development) you have received that supported your development as a teacher.

### **Purpose, Outcomes, & General TG Questions**

Now, we would like to move to a set of questions that are intended to examine the purpose, outcomes, and components of Teach Gwinnett:

1. What do you believe are the goals of the Teach Gwinnett program?
2. Why did you choose to enroll in an alternative certification program rather than a traditional university-based program?
3. Why did you elect to participate in Teach Gwinnett rather than another alternative preparation program?
4. If the cost for you to participate in the Teach Gwinnett program was more than what you paid, would you still have chosen to participate?
5. How much would you have been willing to pay to participate in Teach Gwinnett?
6. What do you think it costs for the district to educate one Teach Gwinnett teacher per year in the program?

### **Program Structure**

Now, we would like to talk about specific elements of the Teach Gwinnett program

1. Above and beyond your regular teaching duties, is(was) the time you spend (spent) on Teach Gwinnett activities more, less, or about what you expected?
2. If I were a potential Teach Gwinnett candidate, how would you describe the structure of the program? What would I have to do as a candidate in this program?
3. What Teach Gwinnett sponsored training opportunities have you participated in?
  - a. Was it timely – did you learn information, acquire skills, in a timely manner? (Sequencing)
  - b. Did the training opportunities meet your individual needs?
4. We know there are various components of the Teach Gwinnett program. Is there one component in particular that is most valuable?
  - a. If so, which one and what makes it most valuable?
  - b. Least valuable?
5. Did you have to take coursework outside of Teach Gwinnett? If so, what was it?
6. Could you tell me a little about how your Candidate Support team functioned?
  - a. How often do you meet with your Candidate Support Team?
  - b. Do you attend the CST meetings?
  - c. Does anyone other than the CST team members attend? (e.g., principal)
  - d. What is the primary purpose of these meetings?
  - e. Do you find the CST meetings valuable? (If yes, what is valuable?)
7. How were you and your mentor paired?

- a. Is their teaching assignment similar to yours? (grade level/content)
  - b. What types of support have you received from your mentor?
8. Who do you rely on for logistical support – such as due dates, timelines, or where a class might be meeting?
9. During your Teach Gwinnett program, on who do (did) you rely for instructional support?
  - a. In terms of this instructional support, what sorts of things did you work on with your (prior answer) \_\_\_\_\_?
  - b. In what format was the feedback provided? (written, conversation)
10. Did you find the Teach Gwinnett evaluation process valuable?
11. When did you complete the program? When are you planning on completing the program?
12. What determines when you finish the program?

### **Branding**

1. How do you think Teach Gwinnett candidates are perceived by principals? Other teachers?  
*Ask only if there is no mention of Gwinnettized, Gwinnett Way, Grow your own.*  
 What are the primary benefits of participating in the Teach Gwinnett program?  
 We've heard people mention the Gwinnett Way, what do you think this means in relationship to Teach Gwinnett?
2. If you had to describe it to an external stakeholder how would you define the Gwinnett Way?

### **Program Management**

1. In your opinion, what about this program is most valuable to the district?
2. Did Teach Gwinnett help you become a better teacher?
3. How will we know whether or not the TG program is successful?

### **Additional Questions:**

- What else do we need to know about/focus on that we haven't already discussed?

## **TEACH GWINNETT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

### **District Administrator – Executive Director for Staffing**

The primary purpose of this interview is to learn more about the program, evaluate its strengths and weaknesses, and understand how it fits into the GCPs Strategic Vision and how that vision for the program is aligned across stakeholders. One aspect of that is to better understand the role of district leaders and their impressions of the program. Further, as a district leader who supports this program, you are an important resource for recognizing components of the program that are particularly strong or valuable, but also your perspective can help us identify those aspects of the program that are in need of improvement or are unnecessary.

#### **Research questions:**

1. How does Teach Gwinnett meet the needs of the district, the school, the candidate?
  2. How does Teach Gwinnett support the district's Strategic Priorities?
  3. Is Teach Gwinnett a successful program?
- 

#### **Background**

1. Please tell me about your career path.
  - a. Can you tell me about your post-secondary experience? The schools you've attended and the degrees you've earned?
  - b. Please list the positions and professional experiences that lead you to this position?

#### **Philosophy/Values/Beliefs**

2. What does it mean to be an effective teacher?
3. What does it mean to be an effective mentor?
4. How does Teach Gwinnett support these criteria?

#### **Staffing Strategies**

5. What are the district's current staffing initiatives and strategies?
  - a. Teaching/Local school
6. How does the current practice differ from initiatives and strategies in place two years ago?
7. What directions do principals receive from the central office about selection of teachers?
  - a. In general
  - b. Non-certified
8. What are our critical need areas?

#### **Purpose**

9. Is it important to have a district-based alternative certification program? If so, why?

10. Are there benefits of hiring teachers who enroll in and complete alternative certification as compared to traditional certification? If so, what are those benefits?
11. All other variables being equal, would you prefer that a principal select a candidate with a degree in Math education or a candidate with a degree in accounting with professional experience in the financial sector?
12. What was the impetus for the development of Teach Gwinnett?
  - a. Who drove the process?
  - b. How were you involved?
  - c. Was there opposition to the introduction of a district-based alternative preparation program?
    - i. Internal or external
13. Currently, what is the purpose of the TG program?
  - a. Has that purpose changed over time? If so, why?
14. How do you perceive the quality of Teach Gwinnett as a preparation program for teachers?
  - a. In comparison to other alternative certification programs?
  - b. In comparison to other traditional programs?
15. How is Teach Gwinnett aligned with district priorities?
  - a. What staffing role does Teach Gwinnett play in this district? Has that changed over time? How has the economy had an impact on these changes?
  - b. How does Teach Gwinnett fit in with other staffing strategies? (Critical Needs Fair - April 16)
16. How will we know whether the TG program is successful?

### **Branding**

17. Are principals aware of the Teach Gwinnett program?
  - a. How do principals learn about the program?
18. Do principals support the Teach Gwinnett program? How do you know?
19. *Ask only if there is no mention of Gwinnettized, Gwinnett Way, Grow your own.*
  - i. *How do non-Teach Gwinnett teachers become acclimated to the district?*
  - ii. *We've heard people mention the Gwinnett Way, what do you think this means in relationship to Teach Gwinnett?*
20. If you had to describe it to an external stakeholder how would you define the "Gwinnett Way"?
21. How do you think the introduction of TFA in GCPS might have an impact on Teach Gwinnett?

### **Program Management**

22. What does it cost to operate Teach Gwinnett each year? How does that compare to other staffing strategies?
23. In your opinion, what about this program is most valuable to the district?

**Additional Questions:**

- 24. What is expected/appropriate candidate attrition?
- 25. Are Teach Gwinnett graduates protected under the non-renewal process?
- 26. New strategies for staffing?
- 27. What else do we need to know about/focus on that we haven't already discussed?

## **TEACH GWINNETT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

### **District Administrator – Chief Human Resources Officer**

The primary purpose of this interview is to learn more about the program, evaluate its strengths and weaknesses and understand how it fits into the GCPS Strategic Vision and how that vision for the program is aligned across stakeholders. One aspect of that is to better understand the role of district leaders and their impressions of the program. Further, as a district leader who supports this program, you are an important resource for recognizing components of the program that are particularly strong or valuable, but also your perspective can help us identify those aspects of the program that are in need of improvement or are unnecessary.

#### **Research questions:**

1. How does Teach Gwinnett meet the needs of the district, the school, the candidate?
  2. How does Teach Gwinnett support the district's Strategic Priorities?
  3. Is Teach Gwinnett a successful program?
- 

#### **Background**

1. Please tell me about your career path.
  - a. Educational background
  - b. GCPS connection prior to employment

#### **Philosophy/Values/Beliefs**

2. What does it mean to be an effective teacher?
3. What does it mean to be an effective mentor?
4. How does Teach Gwinnett support these criteria?

#### **Purpose**

5. Is it important to have a district-based alternative certification program? If so, why?
  - a. In comparison to other alternative certification programs?
  - b. In comparison to other traditional programs?
6. Are there benefits of hiring teachers who enroll in and complete alternative certification as compared to traditional certification? If so, what are those benefits?
7. Why do you think the state supports alternative certification programs? Specifically, district-based programs?
8. What was the impetus for the development of Teach Gwinnett?
  - a. Who drove the process?
  - b. How were you involved?
    - i. Staffing?
  - c. Was there opposition to the introduction of a district-based alternative preparation program?
    - i. Internal or external
  - d. What problem was Teach Gwinnett designed to solve?

9. Currently, what is the purpose of the TG program?
  - a. Has that purpose changed over time? If so, why?
10. Is Teach Gwinnett aligned with district priorities? How so?
  - a. What staffing role does Teach Gwinnett play in this district? Has that changed over time? How has the economy had an impact on these changes?
  - b. How does Teach Gwinnett fit in with other staffing strategies? (Critical Needs Fair - April 16)
11. How will we know whether or not the TG program is successful?

### **Structure**

12. Are there other significant changes to the program that you are aware of?
  - a. What prompted those changes?
13. How are teachers selected for Teach Gwinnett?
  - a. Screening happens at the interview stage (with principal?)
14. What is expected/appropriate candidate attrition?

### **Branding**

15. Are principals aware of the Teach Gwinnett program? How do you know?
16. Do principals support the Teach Gwinnett program? How do you know?
17. What are the primary differences between a non-Teach Gwinnett novice teacher and a novice Teach Gwinnett teacher?
  - a. Support
  - b. Acclimation to the district
18. *Ask only if there is no mention of Gwinnettized, Gwinnett Way, Grow your own.*
  - i. *How do non-Teach Gwinnett teachers become acclimated to the district?*
  - ii. *We've heard people mention the Gwinnett Way, what do you think this means in relationship to Teach Gwinnett?*
19. If you had to describe it to an external stakeholder how would you define the Gwinnett Way?
20. How do non-Teach Gwinnett teachers learn the "Gwinnett Way"?
21. How do you think the introduction of TFA in GCPS might have an impact on Teach Gwinnett?

### **Program Management**

22. What does it cost to operate Teach Gwinnett each year?
23. What do you think it costs for the district to educate one Teach Gwinnett teacher per year in the program?
24. In your opinion, what about this program is most valuable to the district?

### **Additional Questions:**

25. What else do we need to know about/focus on that we haven't already discussed?

## **TEACH GWINNETT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

### **District Administrator – Coordinator of Teach Gwinnett**

The primary purpose of this interview is to learn more about the program, evaluate its strengths and weaknesses and understand how it fits into the GCPS Strategic Vision and how that vision for the program is aligned across stakeholders. One aspect of that is to better understand the role of district leaders and their impressions of the program. Further, as a district leader who supports this program, you are an important resource for recognizing components of the program that are particularly strong or valuable, but also your perspective can help us identify those aspects of the program that are in need of improvement or are unnecessary.

#### **Research questions:**

1. How does Teach Gwinnett meet the needs of the district, the school, the candidate?
  2. How does Teach Gwinnett support the district's Strategic Priorities?
  3. Is Teach Gwinnett a successful program?
- 

#### **Background**

1. Please tell me about your career path.
  - a. Educational background
  - b. GCPS connection prior to employment

#### **Position**

2. How long have you served as Teach Gwinnett Coordinator?
3. How did you learn about this position?
  - a. Who recommended you for this position?
  - b. What were the steps in your application process?
4. What types of training or experience have you had that prepared you for this role?
5. How did you and the previous Coordinator plan the transition of leadership?
  - a. What was the most challenging aspect of taking on this role?
  - b. Were there any surprises?
6. If you had to choose one of the following options to characterize the most important aspect of your role, which would you choose (and why?):
  - a. Manager
  - b. Facilitator
  - c. Supervisor
  - d. Instructor
7. Can you tell me about the primary responsibilities as Coordinator?
  - a. Where do you feel you spend the majority of your time?
  - b. In future years do you anticipate distributing some of these responsibilities to other program staff? (individual candidate meetings)
8. What type of leadership style do you use with the TG staff?
  - a. Why? Is this your default leadership style?
9. Who do you turn to for support?
10. How are you evaluated as a Coordinator?



11. Can you provide a description of your primary duties (overall – not just Teach Gwinnett)?
12. Can you estimate the percent of time you spend on each?

### **Purpose**

13. What was the impetus for the development of this program?
14. Currently, what is the purpose of the TG program?
  - a. Has that purpose changed over time? If so, why?
15. Specifically, what do you think the district hopes to achieve through this program?
16. How does Teach Gwinnett align with district priorities?
17. Is it important to have a district-based alternative certification program? If so, why?
18. From a district perspective, what do you think about the benefits of Teach Gwinnett compared to other alternative preparation programs? Compared to traditional preparation programs?
19. In regard to Teach Gwinnett and Georgia TAPP programs, are state and district purposes aligned?
  - a. If not, how might they differ?
20. How will we know whether or not the TG program is successful?
21. In your opinion, what about this program is most valuable to the district?
22. What does it cost to operate Teach Gwinnett each year?
23. What do you think it costs for the district to educate one Teach Gwinnett teacher per year in the program?

### **Branding**

24. How are principals made aware of the Teach Gwinnett program?
25. Do principals support the Teach Gwinnett program? How do you know?
26. Imagine a graduate of Teach Gwinnett is describing the program to a non-certified teacher. What would you hope they would highlight about the program?
27. What are the primary differences between a non-Teach Gwinnett novice teacher and a novice Teach Gwinnett teacher?
  - a. Support
  - b. Acclimation to the district
  - c. *Ask only if there is no mention of Gwinnettized, Gwinnett Way, Grow your own.*
    - i. *How do non-Teach Gwinnett teachers become acclimated to the district?*
    - ii. *We've heard people mention the Gwinnett Way, what do you think this means in relationship to Teach Gwinnett?*
28. If you had to describe it to an external stakeholder how would you define the Gwinnett Way?
29. How do non-Teach Gwinnett teachers learn the "Gwinnett Way"?

30. How do you think the introduction of TFA in GCPS might have an impact on Teach Gwinnett?

### **Program Management**

#### ***Management of Teach Gwinnett Instructional Coaches***

1. What does it mean to be an effective Instructional Coach for TG?
2. What are your expectations for instructional coaches?
3. How are those employees selected?
4. What skills and characteristics are prioritized when selecting the staff?
5. What are the primary responsibilities of Instructional Coaches?
6. How are Instructional Coaches evaluated?

#### ***Management of Supervisors***

1. What does it mean to be an effective Teach Gwinnett supervisor?
2. What are the supervisors' primary responsibilities? Your expectations?
3. How are supervisors selected? What skills and characteristics are prioritized when selecting supervisors?
4. How are supervisors assigned to candidates? In terms of supervisors, do the assignment criteria matter?
5. How do address reliability of rating across supervisors? Within supervisors (among candidates)?
6. What types of training are provided for supervisors?
7. Do you meet with supervisors? How often? For what purpose?
8. How are supervisors evaluated? By whom?

#### ***Management of Mentors***

1. What does it mean to be an effective mentor?
2. What are the mentors' primary responsibilities? Your expectations?
3. What is the selection/assignment process for mentors?
  - a. Is there an attempt to match mentors and candidates by level, content area, or special practice?
  - b. If so, how do you manage that matching process?
  - c. Is this an optimal design for the structure of the program?
    - i. If indicates principal makes the decision – probe for details about why this is the status quo.
4. What training is provided for mentors?
5. How are mentors evaluated?

#### ***Management of Candidates***

1. What does it mean to be an effective teacher?
2. Describe the ideal Teach Gwinnett recruit?
3. How are candidates identified and selected?
  - a. What are the other recruitment strategies?
    - i. Internal
    - ii. External

4. Candidates are required to be hired prior to enrolling in the program. Why is this standard practice?
  - a. Why not find great candidates and then work with them to find a placement within the district?
5. Do candidates provide feedback regarding their experiences with mentors, supervisors and instructional coaches? (specifically for each one)
6. How do you determine when a candidate needs additional support?
7. How do you determine if a candidate is not going to be successful?
8. What steps, leading to enrollment in Teach Gwinnett, indicate that an individual is a high quality candidate? Who is involved in making that determination? What are the criteria? Are there any different expectations of Teach Gwinnett candidates rather than other novice teachers?
9. What is the most difficult challenge for the typical Teach Gwinnett candidate?
10. What is the most typical strength of Teach Gwinnett candidates?

#### ***Management of Principals/Assistant Principals***

1. How is the building administrator on the CST identified?
2. What are the expectations of that person?
3. How does TG communicate with that person, especially regarding the expectation of their role.
4. Is there any training provided to these APs who serve as members of the CST?

#### **Structure of the Program**

1. What updates and changes have there been?
  - a. Recruitment/Selection of candidates
  - b. Preparation and Training
    - i. What is summer institute designed to accomplish?
    - ii. Given typical alternative certification program training that happens in the summer, do you think that the summer institute is of the appropriate duration?
    - iii. Does the current curriculum (seminars and other training opportunities) provided to the candidates meet their needs?
    - iv. What changes are on the horizon for these training opportunities?
  - c. Support
    - i. Do you envision any changes to the CST structure?
  - d. Evaluation
    - i. How is evaluation being changed this year?
    - ii. Inter-rater reliability? Training?
2. What's your long-term vision for Teach Gwinnett?

## **TEACH GWINNETT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

### **District Administrator – Executive Director for Professional Development**

The primary purpose of this interview is to learn more about the program, evaluate its strengths and weaknesses and understand how it fits into the GCPS Strategic Vision and how that vision for the program is aligned across stakeholders. One aspect of that is to better understand the role of district leaders and their impressions of the program. Further, as a district leader who supports this program, you are an important resource for recognizing components of the program that are particularly strong or valuable, but also your perspective can help us identify those aspects of the program that are in need of improvement or are unnecessary.

#### **Research questions:**

1. How does Teach Gwinnett meet the needs of the district, the school, the candidate?
  2. How does Teach Gwinnett support the district's Strategic Priorities?
  3. Is Teach Gwinnett a successful program?
- 

#### **Background**

1. Please tell me about your career path.
  - a. Educational background
  - b. GCPS connection prior to employment

#### **Philosophy/Values/Beliefs**

2. What does it mean to be an effective teacher?
3. What does it mean to be an effective mentor?
4. What does it mean to be an effective supervisor – as in Teach Gwinnett supervisors?
5. How does Teach Gwinnett embody, develop and support these criteria?
  - a. Can you provide some clear examples of strategies designed to achieve this?
  - b. OTHERS?
6. How is the program staffed?
  - a. How are those employees selected?
  - b. What skills and characteristics are prioritized when selecting the program coordinator?
  - c. Is there another leadership position that position – one that is not filled?

#### **Purpose**

7. What was the impetus for the development of this program?
8. When did the PSC begin offering authorization of district-based preparation programs?
9. Currently, what is the purpose of the TG program?
  - a. Has that purpose changed over time? If so, why?
  - b. Can you explain why you think the state supports such programs?
10. Specifically, what do you think the district hopes to achieve through this program?

11. In regard to Teach Gwinnett and Georgia TAPP programs, are state and district purposes aligned?
  - a. If not, how might they differ?
12. How does Teach Gwinnett align with district priorities?
  - a. Other staffing strategies?
13. Is it important to have a district-based alternative certification program? If so, why?
14. From a district perspective, what do you think about the benefits of Teach Gwinnett compared to other alternative preparation programs? Compared to traditional preparation programs?

### **Role & Requirements**

15. Describe the nature of your role in Teach Gwinnett.
16. Why do you think Teach Gwinnett falls under your purview instead of Staffing?
17. How was Teach Gwinnett developed? Who spearheaded the application process?
18. What is the purpose of the Advisory Board? How are members selected?

### **Structure**

19. What have been the most significant changes to the program over the last three years?
  - a. What prompted those changes?
20. How are teachers selected for Teach Gwinnett?
  - a. Has this always been the strategy?
  - b. If not, why did the strategy change?
  - c. Where is the rigor? At the time of hire? Selection for the program? During the preparation phase?
21. What is expected/appropriate candidate attrition?
22. Does the sequence of your coursework/support/evaluations support development as a new teacher?

### **Branding**

23. Are principals aware of the Teach Gwinnett program? How do you know?
24. Do principals support the Teach Gwinnett program? How do you know?
25. How do program participants remain connected to TG upon program completion, if at all?
26. How do non-TG teachers view Teach Gwinnett participants? How do you know?
27. How do you think the introduction of TFA in GCPS will impact Teach Gwinnett?

### **Program Management**

28. In your opinion, what about this program is most valuable to the district?
29. A lot of evidence is collected for each participant through evaluations, portfolios, and other sources, how is this information used? Is the effort required to collect the information reasonable given the value derived from the analysis/usefulness of the data? Who uses the data?
30. How are TG staff evaluated?
31. How are funds for this program allocated? Who creates the budget?

32. What do you think it costs for the district to educate one Teach Gwinnett teacher per year in the program?

**Additional Questions:**

33. What else do we need to know about/focus on that we haven't already discussed?
34. Can you tell us about the Critical Needs Fair (April 16) and why only certified teachers were invited?

## **TEACH GWINNETT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

### **Member of the Georgia Professional Standards Commission**

The purpose of this interview is to learn more about how GaTAPP developed and the purpose of the GaTAPP program. I also hope to get a better understanding from you of how the labor market in Georgia may have changed over time and how that influenced the introduction and development of alternative certification in Georgia.

#### **Warm-up**

1. Please tell me about your background.
  - a. Professional
  - b. Current position

#### **GaTAPP**

Now, I would like to talk about GaTAPP to better understand the develop of the program and how it intersects

1. What was the impetus for the development of GaTAPP?
  - a. Did anyone or any group oppose the program? If so, can you tell me about that?
2. What is the purpose of the GaTAPP program?
  - a. Production of Teachers
    - i. How many new teachers have been produced through GaTAPP?
    - ii. How many teachers who simply lacked certification have been certified?
    - iii. Does it matter whether a program targets internal vs. external candidates?
    - iv. Does the state consider the types of teachers being produces through programs? How is that monitored?
  - b. Certification/Qualification of Teachers
    - i. How does the PSC evaluate candidate quality (teacher effectiveness)?
    - ii. How does the PSC evaluate program quality?
    - iii. Is there any evidence about quality of teacher preparation programs other than GaTAPP programs?
    - iv. Aside from target candidates, how is the approval process for university- & college-based teacher preparation programs different from the authorization of GaTAPP programs?
3. Is it important for the state of Georgia to continue to support alternative routes? Why?
4. What entities are allowed to support GaTAPP programs?
5. What is the process an organization must complete to become an authorized provider?
1. How does the state evaluate GaTAPP programs? What is considered success?

## **Appendix III – Focus Group Protocol**

### **TEACH GWINNETT – Mentor Focus Group**

#### ***Welcome***

Thank everyone for coming. We promised to keep this to one hour. If we reach 6:00 and the discussion is still going strong, we may continue for a few extra minutes, but certainly understand if you need to leave. Again, we appreciate your participation in this project.

#### ***Purpose***

We are charged with completing a program evaluation for Teach Gwinnett. The primary purpose of the evaluation is to learn more about the program. One aspect of that is to better understand how participants feel about Teach Gwinnett. Further, as participants, you are our best resource for recognizing components of the program that are particularly strong or valuable, but also you help us identify those aspects of the program that are in need of improvement or are unnecessary.

#### ***Review of Ground Rules***

Before we begin, I would like to ask you to take a look at the list of ground rules we have established for our focus group today. We expect that as teachers you are all familiar with the types of communication that are important to make this process successful. I'll ask you to read over all six rules, but want to emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers today. You may have varied experiences with the program, and we want to hear about all of those experiences.

#### ***Informed Consent & Confidentiality***

Please review and sign the informed consent form while I briefly go over our process. As previously noted, we are using data collected from this focus group to guide the development of our evaluation of Teach Gwinnett. We will not use data collected from this meeting in any formal reports or written documentation. We will keep all information from this meeting confidential. Analyses that compile information learned through this focus group will only be reported in the aggregate. Of course, we should note that confidentiality not only depends on us, but on you, as well. We ask that you agree to keep the information shared in this room confidential. If you have any questions or concerns with this process, please feel free to ask or comment. Of course, at any time, you may choose to end your participation in the focus group. Are there any questions before we move on?

#### ***Ice Breaker***

Please state your name, your school, and the number of years you've been in education.

#### **Philosophy & Background**

1. What does it mean to be an effective teacher?
2. How many of you have served as a mentor prior to being a TG mentor?



- a. How does this mentor experience differ from other mentoring experiences?
- 3. What does it mean to be an effective mentor?
- 4. What types of training have you received to prepare you for your role as a Teach Gwinnett mentor?
  - a. Do you feel prepared to explain the sequence and steps of TG to your candidate?
    - i. If you had questions about the program, do you feel comfortable contacting the TG staff? (Who is that person?)
- 5. How many of you have the same area/concentration as your TG candidate?
  - a. Does that impact your ability to support the candidate?
- 6. How did you learn about this position?

### **Role**

- 7. Describe the purpose of your role in Teach Gwinnett.
- 8. As a Teach Gwinnett mentor, what are your primary duties?
  - a. How do you balance support and evaluation?
- 9. Describe the interactions between you and other members of the CST.
  - a. How often do you meet with your CST?

### **Requirements**

- 10. On average, how many hours a week do you spend on Teach Gwinnett-related activities?
  - a. Was this more, less, or about what you expected?
- 11. Aside from CST meetings, what types of meetings are you required to attend as a Teach Gwinnett mentor?
  - a. Was this more, less, or about what you expected?
- 12. What types of paperwork are you required to complete?
  - a. Is the amount of paperwork consistent with the value of the information provided?
  - b. Is there a specific form that is particularly useful/completely useless for you or your candidate?
- 13. How are you evaluated as a TG mentor?
  - a. What type of feedback do you get?
  - b. How does this support your development as a mentor?
  - c. Who provides this feedback?

### **Purpose, Outcomes, & Other**

- 14. Why do you believe the district created the TG program? (NEED)
- 15. What do you think the district hopes to achieve through this program?
- 16. How will we know that the TG program is successful?
- 17. Can you estimate the per candidate cost of the TG program?

### **Other**

Are there any other questions that we failed to ask?

## Appendix IV – Administrative Data Request

### Administrative Data

Data Element	Source	Data Element	Source
<b>Student Data</b>		<b>Participant Data</b>	
Test Data (CRCT only)	EDW*	Employee Identification Number	EDW
Gender	EDW	Salary Data	EDW
Date of Birth	EDW	Gender	EDW
Race/Ethnicity	EDW	Date of Birth	EDW
English Language Learner Status	EDW	Race/Ethnicity	EDW
Disability Status	EDW	School Name	EDW
School Name/Code	EDW	School Year	EDW
School Year	EDW	Institution(s) of Higher Education	Resumes
<b>Roster Data</b>		<b>School Data</b>	
School Name/Code	EDW	Title I Status	IMD***
Course Name/Code	EDW	Percent Free/Reduced Price	
Grade Level	EDW	Lunch	EDW
Subject	EDW	Racial/Ethnic Make-up	EDW
Teacher Assigned*	EDW	Percent English Language	
Students Assigned*	EDW	Learners	EDW
		Percent Students with Disabilities	EDW
<b>Program Data</b>			
Candidate Rosters	TG**		
TG Budget	TG		
Program Documentation	TG		

\* Education Data Warehouse

\*\* Teach Gwinnett Program Staff

\*\*\* Information Management Division, GCPS

## **Appendix V - Revisions to Georgia's Plan for Title II, Part A: Part I**

### **Title II, Part A: State Organization**

Four state agencies in Georgia have responsibilities for the preparation, certification, teaching assignments, discipline, professional development, and resulting publicly reported student achievement that define highly qualified teachers. These are:

1. The Professional Standards Commission (PSC) – Responsible for setting and enforcing the teacher and paraprofessional preparation standards, state teacher assessments and certification; sanctioning teachers and paraprofessionals for professional misbehavior; teacher recruiting, and reporting teacher work force data for Georgia.
2. The Board of Regents (BOR) - Governs the 15 state institutions that prepare teachers for initial and advanced degrees in content majors and education pedagogy; the Board of Regents sets principles and course requirements for teacher preparation at public institutions of higher education, and manages grant initiatives for innovative programs such as a teacher induction program or the higher education grants that are part of Title II, Part A.
3. Georgia Department of Education (GDOE) - Responsible for professional development of teachers, setting the state teacher pay scale, establishing the state curriculum that teachers teach, student assessments, school improvement efforts and NCLB programs.
4. The Office of Student Achievement (OSA)-Responsible for collecting, analyzing and reporting state student achievement data. Georgia operates a single statewide accountability system for public education that provides a focus for schools, creates a reward structure for success and gives parents information about how their children are performing. The system provides an accountability profile for each public school and public school district. The profiles include (1) adequate yearly progress for schools and school districts (2) a performance index for schools (3) performance highlights for schools and school districts.

### **PSC Responsibilities for Title II, Part A Funding**

As the state agency responsible for teacher preparation approval and certification, PSC has responsibility for the following requirements of NCLB Title II, Part A:

- Review LEA applications, as part of the consolidated state application for NCLB funds
- Provide feedback to LEAs on status of funds use
- Monitor the compliance of statewide, state higher education (SHE) and local funds
- Report annually on the state's progress toward meeting the state's annual teacher quality goals and improvement of LEAs toward meeting teacher quality requirements
- Assess the impact of the funding on student learning
- Assess the impact of the funding on improving teacher quality

- Provide an educational role in interpreting the purpose and use of the federal funds allotment in collaboration with DOE
- Provide technical assistance in developing a process to assure a highly qualified teacher in every classroom for each LEA
- Develop mechanisms to support certification requirements with educational opportunities
- Develop and implement state activities that complement LEA activities and needs
- Work with the IHE to develop competitive grants for the state and LEA activities

#### **LEA Responsibilities for Title II, Part A**

- Develop a plan to ensure that all teachers teaching core academic subjects within the district served by the LEA are highly qualified by the end of the 2005-06 school year
- Develop a plan to ensure that all principals hired within the district served by the LEA are highly qualified not later than the end of the 2005-06 school year
- Develop a plan to ensure that all paraprofessionals employed within the district served by the LEA are highly qualified not later than the end of the 2005-06 school year
- Establish measurable benchmarks to mark each year's progress toward a highly qualified teaching staff
- Report on progress to assure highly qualified teachers each year beginning with 2001 through 2006

#### **PSC Goals**

1. To provide technical assistance and guidance to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) as they develop an ongoing process to ensure quality teachers in every classroom
2. To identify and implement state-wide activities that complement and support the local activities to ensure quality teachers in every classroom. These activities are related to the Department of Education (DOE) responsibilities for professional learning and the Committee on Quality Teaching (CQT) efforts to support educator quality
3. To report on compliance of local school systems in meeting the goal of a highly qualified teacher in every classroom by 2006

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